



\$2.50 a year.

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May 8, 1883.

NO 182. VOL. VII. PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS, 98 WILLIAM ST., N. Y. PRICE, 5 CENTS

An American Queen;

OR,

THE HEART OF GOLD.

BY GRACE MORTIMER.

CHAPTER I.

TOO LATE.

INFORMATION WANTED—of Ada Derwent, maiden name Rivers, native place Addiscombe, State of New York, who married Otto Montacute Derwent, in the year 1850, June 19th—or of her child, issue of said marriage. If she, or said child, will communicate with Messrs. Korner & Price, Room 9, No. — Warren street, New York City, they will hear of a long-unclaimed right now completely at their disposal, and greatly to their advantage.

Monica Derwent, only child of the above-mentioned Ada Rivers Derwent, sat by her mother's corpse, reading this announcement in the "personals" of the New York Herald.

She was nineteen years old; her mother had been

a widow all that time; they had lived a toilsome and penurious life, and Mrs. Derwent had died yesterday of the "hard times," and now Monica had discovered this promise of prosperity in an old paper, which she had untwisted from the stems of a great sheaf of white flowers sent her by the clergyman's daughter, to lay about her dead.

It was an humbly furnished little parlor in a tiny frame cottage, very clean and dainty, and garnished delicately with many a graceful fancy, costing nothing but natural taste.

The body, which lay across the two white-draped windows, was that of a woman of thirty-seven, in whose features could be traced the remains of great beauty and refinement; but the slender hands which lay across her bosom were almost transparent, her face was frightfully emaciated, and broad streaks of gray gleamed among her thick, wavy black hair; it was painfully evident that not only sorrow of heart, but actual privation, had brought her to this premature bier.

Monica Derwent was utterly unlike her mother—her features wanted the graceful harmony of hers; also the expression indelibly engraved upon the dead visage, of soft dependence and habitual melancholy, was replaced on the daughter's by one of spirited power and haughty pride; pale, famine-pinched and

poorly clad though she was, she would have attracted a second glance anywhere, through the mere power of her princely air, and the dark dignity of her presence. One rare beauty she possessed. Large finely-shaped lustrous eyes, black and expressive; her hair, too, had it been artistically dressed, would have won praise for its ebony hue and silken gloss.

In truth, what with her tall, slim figure, which only wanted filling out—poor hungered body that it was—and her proud, innocent, significant face, all she lacked was food, dress, and a fortunate expression to make her pass as a more than usually fine woman.

For more than an hour she had sat poring over the advertisement addressed to her mother, motionless, blind, and deaf; she was looking back over those nineteen years which her mother and she had trodden hand in hand, illumined as they now were by the light of this most unexpected announcement.

The paper was two months old.

Two months ago her mother's strength had been, though ebbing, at full enough tide for Dr. Seymour, the village physician, to say to her in his off-hand way:

"You're all right, madam—sound at the core. Nothing to be afraid of, if you take a rest and feed up. Your trouble comes from nothing but debility.



AT THE MOMENT THAT MONICA FIXED HERS UPON THESE STRANGE EYES, SHE CAUGHT A LOOK, INDESCRIBABLY WILD.

You don't eat enough, and you work too much. Get off to the seaside, and drink cream and eat chickens. That's my prescription."

Timidly informed that she could not take time to rest, nor afford such expensive luxuries as seashores, cream and chickens, he had shrugged his muscular shoulders in its fine broadcloth coat, pouted out his full red mouth portentously, and dashed off an iron and quinine mixture, "to be taken three times a day, for six weeks;" and then, accepting her two dollars with all the graceful unconsciousness with which he would have accepted the five-dollar fee from the wealthy Mrs. Million, relict of the late cracker-merchant of that name, had bowed her smilingly out of his richly-furnished consulting-room, and bowed in the next in line from his elegant waiting-room.

And this foolish woman had crushed up the prescription in her thin, hot nervous hand, as she slowly wended her feeble way home through the driving sleet, for she had no weekly seventy-five cents to spare, the sum which the strengthening mixture would call for, so why should she distress poor Monica with the sight of the prescription? And she sat down to her work again, trying to see the exquisite stitches through the red motes that were dancing before her eyes, and to hide the creeping chills which ran through her shadowy frame, in spite of the sparkling, well-swept fire, which Monica had just lit in time for her return, having furtively let it go out, to save the fuel, in her absence. So she told the satisfactory news that Dr. Seymour said she had no organic disease, and was only weary.

"So, darling," she said, cheerfully, "I won't stick so constantly at the lace-making, but relax the strain by doing the housework turn about with you, instead of letting you do it all; but, dear, you will have to learn to sew lace more quickly, or else get a new inspiration, and invent a design more popular than any you have invented yet, make your fortune, and retire with your poor, broken-down mammy. Eh, dearie?"

And while the doomed mother was talking thus, trying to smother under these playful speeches the dark conviction that death had marked her, and while faithful Monica was listening and looking wistfully at the fading victim of poverty, this advertisement, which seemed to promise prosperity, or, at least, relief, was already in print, calling—calling them to come and be helped, and they had never seen it!

Too late—oh, anguished thought—too late! "Merciless Creator!" murmured Monica, raising her black eyes bitterly to the wintry heavens; "your succor comes only to fill higher my cup of despair. My mother has starved to death!"

It seems terrible to own that such a thing is possible in a Christian community like that in which they lived—Loangerie, not a hundred miles distant from that nucleus of splendidly organized charities, Philadelphia; but it was true. Mrs. Derwent and her daughter could afford nothing more costly than the coarsest and simplest food, and the invalid had died for want of better. Her wasted system had demanded just such rich and dainty fare as the comfortable Dr. Seymour had prescribed; she had not the means to procure such, and so, surrounded by good and kind-hearted people, all of whom respected her highly and looked up to her as a superior character—receiving just as much lace-work from a wealthy merchant in the village as she could do, and a handsome price for it, besides the modest but really helpful salary which Monica received in her position of district school-mistress—in spite of all these facts, Mrs. Derwent had died of want.

How had it been? How could it have been? Was that what Monica was asking herself, as she sat there beside her dead mother, holding the paper that spoke of better days for her?

Was that what brought the lines of painful thought upon her smooth young brow, and lit the moody fire in her eyes?

Yes; Monica was once again groping blindly in the sinister darkness of a secret which her mother had held inviolate during her whole life, and which she had carried to the land of spirits with her.

Mrs. Derwent had always earned a comfortable income from her lace-hoop, more especially since Monica had developed a talent for designing new and exquisite patterns, which in their graceful originality were eagerly purchased by connoisseurs; and Monica had received, as we have said, enough to maintain herself ever since she was twelve years old, and tall enough to see her scholars' heads over the tall teacher's desk; the neighbors loved and honored the widow and child, and would have been glad to help them, had they been able under these circumstances to dream that they needed help; yet Mrs. Derwent had died the death of helpless destitution.

Where did she put their money?

Monica had grown up under the shadow of this mystery; it had been her one insufferable annoyance, suggesting the only hideous thoughts that ever had entered into her pure and lofty mind; it had eaten and eaten into her reverential love for her mother, until one day, long ago, she had burst out with a passionate demand for some, for any explanation, confessing with grief, that a host of terrible suspicions had crowded her thoughts; so that Mrs. Derwent, at first startled and remonstrant, then cut to the heart, had folded her gentle arms about the trembling girl, pillowed her head upon her own swelling bosom, and spoken as follows:

"My child, I had hoped that you noticed nothing that could disturb or perplex you; I see now that my poor little diplomacy is too transparent to blind you. This matter that you have distressed yourself so much about, is the one secret I must keep from all the world—even from you, dear girl. It is a very bitter secret, it has crushed my spirit to the earth for all the years of my widowhood. If it would only

please God to remove it, I should be at peace, contented and happy with you, my darling good child. If I were to tell it to you, your dear young life would be overshadowed with a curse which would im-bitter every hour. And yet it is not for this reason alone, that I keep you in ignorance of it, nor is it for my own sake, for I am utterly guiltless in the matter; but there is a person alive for whose sake I keep it, ay, and must keep it as long as I live, and carry it to my grave with me. Now, my darling girl, you must dismiss the matter from your thoughts. You trust in your mother's integrity, do you not? Yes, you do, my sweet; you never really doubted me, I am sure; those ideas which distressed you were only the natural efforts of filial affection to fathom a mystery which obviously clouded your mother's life. All I can say in explanation, dear, is, that as long as I live I am bound to put aside, and secretly to forward to—some one—somewhere—half of whatever income I may get; even if it were but one dollar a year I must part with fifty cents of it."

And then she had glided away, with a very pained and roused look on her usually meek face, and a sudden haughtiness of mien that struck cold to Monica's heart, suggesting, as it did, certain hidden depths in her mother's character, and events in her past, that came like iron hands pushing them a little apart.

And, although the high-minded daughter had never again whispered another inquiry, or looked curiously; but had put entire faith in her mother's integrity, according to her gentle request, and driven the secret from her mind, as far as that lay in her power, still, we say, there had not passed one day since, that she had not been visited by the consciousness of a something sinister and disastrous brooding over her home.

Half of all she could earn—handed over to a nameless being, as long as she lived!

That was the gist of her mother's secret.

But Monica thanked God every day, with passionate gratitude, that she could believe her mother guiltless, and clung to the belief with a desperate hold, heaping only the more love upon her, devoting to her the more assiduously fond and unwearied services; fronting fate for her with the loftier courage; for Monica Derwent held reserves of pride and heroism in her warm, deep heart, that even she herself could not fathom as yet, and often marveled much at her own haughty impulses, so unlike the soft, passive resignation of her sweet mother.

The night before Mrs. Derwent died, she had beckoned her child to her pillow, and with a pale and thankful smile had murmured in her ear:

"Fear nothing from that old sorrow of mine, my darling; with my death the price is fully paid—there is nothing more to give. It dies with me; henceforth you walk free."

As Monica mused with the newspaper in her lap, and her gaze fastens bitterly upon the dead face of her idolized mother, strange thoughts are busy in her brain. She is trying to trace the connection between her mother's secret and this expression in the advertisement, "*A long-unclaimed right.*"

From her knowledge of her mother's self-sacrificing, dependent and timorous nature, Monica reasoned that if any sacrifice had been made, any fortunate right allowed to lie unclaimed, it must have been she who had made it—she who had refrained from claiming that right; therefore, (and Monica's heart swelled with hot and acrid regret) circumstances had at last so transpired that the fortune, if fortune it was, had sought her through the columns of the everywhere-read New York Herald, since she would not seek it.

And it had come too late—too late.

That was always the heartrending refrain of all Monica's thoughts; here was help for her mother, and it was too late.

By what perversity of destiny had it chanced that not one of the half-a-dozen subscribers to the New York Herald in Loangerie had noticed this announcement, and told her mother of it?

As Monica asked herself this she recalled, with a throes of fierce rebellion and disdain, the evil repute in which this very column of anonymous communications was held by all Christian people, and as the people of Loangerie were *par excellence* a most devout and rigid set of Christians, who would as soon own to dancing the can-can as to poring over that disreputable column, it was easy enough to guess that those six deacons who took the paper in Loangerie never perused the advertising sheet or permitted it to fall into the hands of their families; and that so the paragraph which would have saved her mother's life had never been read here.

Was it running still? Or had some spurious claimant, more wide-awake than the doomed widow, snatched at the chance to reap what benefit there was, and was this all that Monica would ever see or hear of the matter?

The girl's haggard face suddenly fired crimson, her eyes sparkled.

She rose and went to her mother's bier, and standing over it, she gazed long at the sweet, cold marble face there, as if she would photograph it, in all its pathetic attenuation and purity, upon her memory.

Yes, she had faithfully believed in her mother, in her goodness, worth, her sweet, proud, pure life, and in her hard ill-usage by an adamant Providence.

There had been something that could not be told. Yes—but it was not shame to her mother. No, no! She had certainly been the dupe of an invisible and sinister power, a vampire which had sucked the life-blood out of her veins until here she lay dead.

And now deliverance had come, and it was too late!

"Let me avenge her—that is all I shall live for!" panted Monica Derwent, and stooping, she sealed

her vow by a long, anguished kiss on her mother's dead lips.

The funeral was over.

Its expenses, humble as they were, had drained Monica's slender purse to a low ebb. She had seen the latest Herald, and the advertisement was running in it still. She was resolved to answer it—to hear what these strangers had to tell her about the "unclaimed right," which she believed to be connected with her mother's secret.

But she was so penniless, that, while the kind-hearted neighbors were cheering her by the reminder that she would at least be little the worse pecuniarily by her invalid mother's decease, since her salary as the village teacher was quite adequate to the supply of her own wants, she was casting about in her mind how she should procure money enough not only to journey to New York, but possibly to remain there for some time to come.

She gathered together all her resources; set her cottage in order for an absence, long or short, she knew not which; and without explaining anything to anybody, except to tell the Rector that she was going to New York on business, she left Loangerie the day after the funeral.

And so calm and self-possessed was she when she went from among them, that all Loangerie looked to see her back at her desk in the little frame school-house in a few days, as before; and gladly accorded her the few days' holiday and change, since her bereavement had been sore, and the poor young thing, though she had made little outward moan, seemed to be stricken for death herself.

But busy was the tongue of rumor when the Monday came—Tuesday, Wednesday—a week, two weeks—a month—a year—years—and she never came back to Loangerie!

CHAPTER II.

"MY FATHER! I WILL NEVER OWN HIM FOR MY FATHER!"

MONICA found in room No. 9, Warren street, Messrs. Korner & Price, two driving and thriving lawyers, not so long in practice as to pass by indifferently any chance of emolument, crooked or straight, and thirsting to manage this matter with benefit to themselves.

They received the young lady from the country, who introduced herself as the only child of Mrs. Ada Derwent, *nee* Rivers, of Addiscombe, with due caution and reserve, until satisfied with the proofs of her identity; and, although they were at first bitterly disappointed to learn of the decease of Mrs. Derwent herself, they soon accommodated themselves to the inevitable, and set about manipulating the survivor to the best of their ability.

Having gleaned from her a distinct account of her mother's and her own history during the past nineteen years, they coolly desired her to come to them that day week, when they hoped to have something definite to tell her about "the important matter in connection with which they had been advertising at immense expense," as they carefully reminded her, for over four months.

As they were resolute, Monica had perforce to obey, and retired to her boarding-house to wait, feeling a growing interest and excitement, as she noted the portentous manner of the lawyers, and vainly tried to guess at the news they had to tell.

Of course she could guess pretty correctly the use they made of that week; that they were sifting her story and proving its truth; but so judiciously did they conduct their inquiries, sending an agent to Loangerie to investigate, *sub rosa*, that not a soul in the straight-laced little townlet dreamed of what was being done.

Having returned on the specified day, Miss Derwent found herself greeted with fervor, placed in the seat of honor, and both the lawyers bustled about her, vying with each other in showing her how they honored her.

This servility angered and disgusted the proud-spirited girl.

Of course, she knew this was a money-matter; guessed at some fine legacy or inheritance, and measured the courtesy of the astute men of affairs by the probable bulk of the fortune.

"Be good enough to come to the point without ceremony," she said, haughtily, "as you see I am too humbly born and bred to appreciate or expect meaningless compliments. And since this matter did not chance until my mother was gone, it can seem of very little moment to me, in my present state of mind. What care I now what befalls?" she said, bitterly, her low stern tones sounding in strange contrast to the fluttered jubilation and gratulation of theirs.

"Ahem! The family spirit!" chuckled Mr. Korner, surreptitiously nudging his partner, Mr. Price, as if her lofty tone pleased him, and reddening uncomfortably when he saw that her bright eyes had detected him. "The fact is, my dear young lady, that by the merest accident we have discovered something of importance—of great importance to the wife or children of Mr. Otto Derwent."

He paused with an impressive smile, waiting for the tremendous announcement to overawe his listener; but she answered, with a gloomy look, utterly regardless of the piquant news he had hinted at:

"As there is only one thing which men in your profession think of enough importance to expend time and talent on, I can easily guess what you are about to tell me. Some relative of my long-dead father has thought of mother, and wishes to assist her pecuniarily. And it is too late."

"Wrong—altogether wrong!" said Mr. Price, with airy enjoyment, and a gallant bow; "Miss Derwent is too unworlly to come near the truth."

"What is the truth, then?" asked she, noting with

a little wonder the repressed excitement of each wary visage.

"It would, perhaps, be well to state that this matter is *entirely in our hands*," said Mr. Korner, very earnestly fixing his eyes on her, and hitching his chair a little nearer hers. "Not a soul but *we two* can assist you to gain your rights. The facts came to our knowledge some months since, and we have already gone to considerable expense and labor collecting information and advertising. You understand?"

"Perfectly," replied she, promptly, with some disdain. "You wish to impress upon me that your services are valuable, and that you will not continue them unless I can pay for them, and am willing to place myself in your hands. I can only say that I am penniless, and will not pledge myself to any course in the dark."

"Very good; we shan't ask you to do anything but what is perfectly just and right," Mr. Korner hastened to assure her; "and as to your present poverty, the whole business is to relieve you of it, and to put it in your power to recompense our services in the future. Which, of course, a lady of your strict sense of justice would wish to do whenever she had a chance," added he, insinuatingly.

She bowed, with a slight smile; somehow the longer they talked of this mysterious business the more she doubted the wisdom of confiding too much in the crafty pair.

"Just tell her distinctly what it is," put in Mr. Price in an anxious aside; "she can't possibly realize the position until she sees it."

So Mr. Korner settled himself in his chair, and with a bland face and congratulatory tone of voice, spoke as follows:

"In the course of a lawyer's practice many secrets leak out, which those concerned thereby never supposed would come to mortal ears. This is an instance; a secret which has been kept for nineteen years has come to our ears, and affects strongly your future, my dear young lady. I may begin the disclosure by saying that this secret is connected with that habit of the late Mrs. Derwent, of handing over to an unknown party the half of her earnings."

"Stop!" exclaimed Monica, suddenly; her cheek had flushed scarlet, and her eyes were sparkling warningly. "My mother deliberately kept this matter from me; even on her death-bed, she said it was best for me not to know what her secret was; so I will not hear it from you. If you cannot explain this business without betraying my mother's secret, I shall go away as ignorant as I came."

"Hem—ahem—a streak of the blood, eh?" muttered Mr. Korner to his colleague; "no use insisting here; might as well try to move the Palisades, eh?" and with a complacent chuckle he resumed. "Very good, Miss Derwent, we can easily avoid trenching on the forbidden subject. For nineteen years you have supposed your father was dead; for nineteen years your mother knew *he was alive*, and residing at his English estate, Dornoch-Weald—"

"WHAT!" gasped Monica, springing to her feet, "my father alive!—oh, impossible!" She gazed from one to the other wildly; their faces inexorably repeated the assertion; she suddenly wheeled and walked to one of the windows, where, with her face hidden, and her hands tremblingly clasped over her breast, she remained still as a stone.

But a storm was raging through her soul; the very depths of her nature were stirred. The idea of a father had ever been but an abstract one to her, the theme had never been dwelt upon by her mother—she had always seemed to shrink from it with a never-blunted pain, and Monica had settled it in her mind that he had been so passionately beloved, and so tragically lost in the first year of marriage, that her mother would carry the wound raw and bleeding to her grave.

Yet he had been alive all the while, and, what was it they had said about an estate? He was then a rich man, living in wealth and ease, and her mother—had died—of want.

As the girl's thoughts reached this climax she stifled a sharp cry as of one stung, and went back to face the whispering lawyers.

"Go on, what else?" she demanded peremptorily. Mr. Korner took up the narration where he had dropped it.

"Your father is alive to this day; and had your mother lived to answer our advertisement in person we would have reinstated her in her rights without the slightest delay. She being unfortunately deceased, we transfer our good offices to you; and whenever you choose to put yourself in our hands we shall present you to Mr. Otto Derwent, and claim for you your legal rights as his daughter."

"But—why were they separated?" faltered Monica, still too stunned to admit a thought of her own position.

"That is part of the secret your mother reserved from you," answered the lawyer; "this much I can tell you however, they separated through no fault of your mother's. She was utterly blameless, the victim of a slander, and of the bitter pride of Derwent. Your father comes of an ancient, proud race, and notwithstanding that he really seems to have loved his young wife (who was extremely pretty and elegant, they tell me, although only the daughter of a country schoolmaster), he was quite able to desert her at a moment's notice seven months after the marriage, and to go home to his fine estates, and never see her face again. To do him justice I will mention that he intended to have sent her all the money she could desire, and began by doing so: but she had her pride too, poor soul, and, besides, was also misled as to something she supposed him to be guilty of, and she fled from the home he had left her in, and hid herself in the little out-of-the-way hole you came from; so that for nineteen years they have not communicated with each other, and he

does not know whether she is dead or alive. And is stone enough never to trouble his head about the matter; but lives the life of a country gentleman, on one of the finest estates in—shire, while she, poor soul, was starving herself to satisfy the rapacity of a swindling villain who took advantage of her—"

"Take care—that's the forbidden subject," interposed Mr. Price, who was reading the expressive face of the daughter with breathless interest, almost fascinated by its vivid changes.

"Will you now be good enough to inform me what your intentions, with regard to my mother were, when you advertised for her?" demanded she, between her teeth.

"Oh, you can easily guess them," said Mr. Korner, cheerfully. "We saw a chance to render justice to two people who had been parted by a mistake, to set the wife in her own place and to clear her reputation in the eyes of her husband. We proposed to put each party in possession of some facts which had come to our knowledge, to effect a reconciliation, and to have had this pleasure (and profit) of making two lives happy. We now propose, the wife being gone, to introduce *you*, the daughter, with all the proofs of your identity in your hands, to your father, who as yet is ignorant of your existence—when you will, without the slightest doubt, receive due recognition as the only child of a very wealthy man."

Monica sat still as death for a few minutes, eying her counselors with slowly gathering scorn. When her heart was full to bursting, her small teeth set in her lip, and her glance flashing with pent-up feeling, she burst out passionately:

"And this is my poor mother's history, is it? Scorned—betrayed—abandoned—perishing in want—because *he* believed a slander! Oh, God! what a demon!"

She wrung her hands in a gust of grief; it was easy to see how intensely the proud fine soul of the daughter had loved and believed in her hapless mother.

"And do you wish *me* to go to the man who did this, and to fawn at his feet for my rights?" she cried, flashing from grief to the most scathing fury and contempt. "You expect *me* to go straight from the grave of my mother, with the memory of her skeleton form and unhappy eyes, and my only reminiscences of her, toil-worn and sad—to that noble estate where my father lives luxuriously and thinks scornfully of his poor young wife! Why, gentlemen, are you *human*, that you think I could do it? I should curse him, and call on God to avenge my mother's blood on his head, instead of kneeling in humble duty for his paternal greeting! Ha! ha! ha! My father, forsooth."

She was rapidly walking from end to end of the office now, panting with excitement and emotion, and flinging glances of the utmost derision and disdain at her would-be counselors.

Mr. Price, whose softer manners made him usually successful with the lady-clients, approached her with deep solicitude, delicately tempered with deference, and begged her, for her own sake, to calm herself, and look practically upon the matter.

"Just think of it, dear Miss Derwent," he plaintively urged. "How few in this world of hard work and crowding competition can, like you, step from dire poverty and friendlessness into a wealthy and refined home? Be a rich man's only daughter—with every chance in life of being his sole heiress—heiress to a fortune worth twenty thousand pounds a year."

"You have said enough," she cried, sternly. "I understand you perfectly. Because he is a wealthy man, you will kindly trouble yourselves to effect an acknowledgment of his child, as you would have effected a reconciliation with his wife—simply with a view to your own future reward. Had he been a poor man, the knowledge which you had accidentally obtained, and which you could use to remove the obstacles between two mistaken people—would have remained forever locked in your own breasts. Oh, yes, I clearly comprehend the position as far as you are concerned. But I am a free agent, you cannot *oblige* me to present myself to Mr. Otto Derwent in the character of long-lost daughter and heir-expectant. Let his money go where it will—I shall touch none of it. I should choke upon his bread—thinking how my mother died for want of it; I should writhe under his caressing hand, remembering how it flung aside my mother with a broken heart."

"But, oh, come now," remonstrated Mr. Korner, with growing anxiety, for neither of them had ever dreamed of any opposition from their client—who in their senses would reject a fortune? "Consider the case, my dear lady; consider it calmly, and don't rush to conclusions in this irrational way; there is so much to be told yet, and after all, he is your father."

"Don't call him my father," cried Monica, passionately; "I cannot and will not consider him my father. He who cast off my mother with insulting suspicions, expressed so cruelly that she scorned to appeal to him again. Never, were I starving—shall I own—"

"Wait! not so rash, for Heaven's sake," interposed Mr. Korner, aghast. "Pray, *pray*, be seated again, and let us explain this thing; you are rushing on at a mad pace. Your father—"

"Do you persist in the term?" cried she, impetuously. "Then I shall not stay to be insulted by it."

She hurried, with burning cheeks, to the door; the pair sprung with one accord to arrest her, and she turned, between them, clasped her hands, and looking Heavenward, said solemnly:

"So help me God, I repudiate Mr. Otto Derwent as my father, even as he repudiated Ada Rivers as his wife."

"But you are terribly mistaken—when we reveal

all—if you would but promise to place yourself in our hands, we could disclose enough of the truth in three words to secure your consent to our scheme."

"Keep your secret, I have learned enough to show me what I ought to do," said she. "However, lest I might make the terrible mistake you so dread, I shall ask you a few questions; so, gentlemen, I beg you will please to answer plainly what I ask," said she, reseating herself with a gloomy derision in her manner.

"Did Mr. Derwent authorize you to search for his wife?"

After a hurried consultation by glances, the senior lawyer answered, "No."

"Does he know anything whatever about your movements?"

"No."

"And this action is undertaken solely upon your own authority, and merely in hopes of future business?"

"Oh, come, come—not quite so bad as that," remonstrated the man of affairs, wincing; "surely no one, with the chance accidentally placed in his power to see justice done the innocent and helpless, could fail to do otherwise than we propose to do by you."

"You say that Mr. Derwent separated from my mother because some one slandered her. Did he give her any chance to vindicate herself, or did he abandon her without explanation?"

"N-n-no—that is to say, yes. I fear he must plead guilty to this charge; still, when you hear—"

"Now, this is the last question," said she, with a faint, bitter smile. "Has Mr. Derwent ever, to your knowledge, expressed either contrition at his early conduct, or indicated a wish to find my mother, to reinstate her in her rights?"

"Well—not exactly."

"Tell me the truth!" cried she, sternly. "Do not dare to deceive me!"

And, for once in his life, singularly awed by the dark menace of a woman's eye, the lawyer blurted out the awkward truth, and spoiled all his pretty scheme.

"No, never."

She rose, folding her poor little crape mantle about her shoulders, as an empress might have folded the royal purple.

"Then, gentlemen," said she, passing a resolute and disdainful look from one disconcerted face to the other, "I beg leave to retire from this field at once, and permanently. For nineteen years I have lived without the aid of a father; I can live the rest as well. For nineteen years my mother has suffered from the selfishness of my father, and I have toiled for my bread, and eaten it sweetly, because it was clean, and did not come from his sullied hands. I shall not forget her sufferings, or abase myself for the rest of my years. Your scheme is defeated; I will have nothing to do with it. Good-day."

And before the astounded practitioners could open their frozen mouths to protest she had gone.

CHAPTER III.

OUT ON THE QUEST.

MONICA went back to her private boarding-house, locked herself into her cheerless, thread-bare fourth-story bedroom, and thought.

This day a cruel revelation had been made to her; the first shock was not yet over; she felt sick and benumbed, like one who has had a terrible fall; she knew not as yet what of her bones were broken and what remained to her sound.

She had been taught to believe her father dead, dead in the first year of her mother's married life, and so seldom talked of, and then so vaguely, that he had ever been but a faint, poetical, and abstract idea, floating in tender shades in which her girlish fancy reveled. And instead of these reverent and dreamy thoughts, she ought to have been cursing him at every fresh pang inflicted by a hard and bitter life upon her mother.

For while *she* was suffering cold, hunger, loneliness, heart-break and hopelessness, *he* was lapped in wealth and ease, thinking wicked evil of her, and in no want of her.

Monica laughed to herself, with mockery sour as verjuice, at the recollection of the lawyer's scheme—that she should present herself to her patrician sire in the character of a fond and favoring daughter, she of whose very existence he was ignorant, she, the issue of that brief and luckless union, the inheritor of her mother's wrongs—the self-imposed avenger. Oh, what a comedy!

She laughed, sitting there by herself, so loudly and wildly that footsteps came hurriedly to her door through the long strange passage, and ears listened in affright, marveling whether the new boarder was going mad.

So she muffled her hysteria, laid her head down on the meager little marble-top table, beside the frowsy map of New York, bound in ill-smelling leather, her head that was so hot, while her feet were like ice, and she tried to soften her heart, and to pray to God, with whom her dear martyred mother was; but she could not do that; no, no, not with the live coal of vengeance glowing in her thoughts.

For Monica was thinking of revenge—revenge on her father.

Only she never called him "father," in her thoughts, never permitted herself to picture him with his arms about her mother, when that mother was a beautiful young village darling, with her diamond bright eyes resting sweetly on his, and her velvet scarlet lips drinking in his breath, in Love's Young Dream! No, rather she thought of those eyes dimmed and caverned by the flow of many tears, and the wasting of much hunger and pain; of those scarlet lips, pale and compressed by the re-

pressing of many sorrows and the enduring of nights and days of humiliating thoughts.

And Monica registered a vow in her hot young heart, that Mr. Otto Montacute Derwent, the selfish English aristocrat, should yet quail before the wrongs of the pure-souled young wife whom he had deserted nineteen years ago, because he could believe evil of her.

She had so far resolved, that she would follow the lawyer's wishes in that she would go to England and confront Mr. Derwent, but not in the character of his heiress expectant. Not that.

As her mother's avenger.

By-and-by as the whirl of her excitement abated, she could recall practical details.

And among the first she remembered, with a great pang of disappointment, that she had not even allowed them to give her Mr. Derwent's address, and how was she to find him? Not for worlds would she again present herself to the pair who had plotted to reinstate her in her rights at the expense of her self-respect.

Fortunately they had no clew to her present whereabouts, and could not, were they ever so anxious, trace her; and one of her instant resolutions had been to elude them altogether, and make her way, unsuspected by living soul, to Mr. Derwent's mansion, enter it in disguise, and after reconnoitering, she would be better able to cope with the cruel nature which had sacrificed her mother.

Suddenly she recalled the name they had mentioned—Dornoch-Weald, in —shire.

She sat up with sparkling eyes; she had found the clew; it would be easy to trace the country seat of a wealthy county family, once she was in that county.

Before she rose from that fateful reverie, Monica Derwent had determined upon her course—a course which was to lead her, all unwitting of its tremendous possibilities, through as strange and terrible an experience as ever madman dreamed, or the King of Evil ever placed before unwary foot.

She said:

"I will go and see this Otto Montacute Derwent, who has spoiled my mother's life, and what heartless cruelty he has dealt her, will I render to him again."

But the sinister shade of another influence stood behind her, gibbering of the awful future, and she saw it not.

Well, she must go at once to Britain, if she would elude the probable search of the New York lawyers, who had set their hopes upon her as a valuable client. She knew that it was not likely that they had gone to the expense and trouble of advertising for her mother unless they saw a good chance of reimbursing themselves; also, that they would leave no stone unturned to trace her again, in the expectation of overruling her objections, and molding her to their own purposes. So she dared not return to Loangerie, even though she possessed not ten dollars in the world, until she went back to her school to earn it.

But Monica was brave in this, the outset of her singular career.

She felt ready to face anything, her burning indignation against the living and her holy love for the dead upholding her untried courage.

The time was not yet come when she could realize, through terrible experience, the true horror of fear; she knew not its haunting visage as yet, for how can one imagine that which has not yet a shape in the mind?

By dint of calm and vigilant search, she found a way to cross the ocean three days after her arrival in New York. She read in her old friend the *Herald*, an advertisement for a child's *bonne*, to travel with a lady and her infant to England. She answered in person, found the lady at a fashionable hotel, very ill, very languid, and not at all too shrewd in her inquiries. Apparently taken at once by the quiet, grave and refined demeanor of the applicant, Mrs. Frothingham beckoned her to approach close to the sofa upon which she reclined in her crimson shawl, and fixing her lustrous, hollow eyes upon her face, poured out her trials, her helplessness, her requirements, and her anticipated sufferings, in low, purring accents flavored strongly of the Southern plantation.

"So thankful to see anybody as presentable as you, my dear, at last," she sighed, having gazed herself satisfied and spoken herself fatigued. "Such a dreadful lot came at first. Oh, mercy! I should have died! But you—why you are quite, quite pretty, my dear; and, yes, you are really lady-like. You will be charmed with my Dottie, I know; such a *Piccolina*. I am so wretchedly ill on the ocean I can do nothing. Celeste, my maid, will nurse me, and you will have Dottie altogether under your charge. There, that's all, isn't it? You accompany me to London, and if you suit, and by that time I shall know it, you will remain with me. I am ordered to England to be under the care of Sir Fretwell Malade, the eminent ladies' physician; I may be there a year; perhaps not so long; it depends upon my recovery; and if you suit you will stay, you know. What do you say?"

Monica had gently arrested her in the even flow of her languid prattling, by putting up her slender, shapely hand, at which the lady stared sharply, recognizing perhaps through the cheap black glove the unusual delicacy of the supposed plebeian member.

"I am sorry to disappoint you, Mrs. Frothingham," said Monica, calmly, "but I can stay no longer with you than to cross the ocean in charge of the child; instantly upon my arrival I shall have to leave. I am extremely disappointed if this will not suit you, for I am obliged to go to England, and I have no money to pay the passage, and so must go in this or some similar way."

The Southern lady, accustomed to have no responsibility whatever upon her delicate shoulders,

looked blank enough at this announcement, and piteously bewailed her hard fate.

"I thought it was too good to be true that I should get such a capable, wise, superior person to go with me," she bemoaned; "and Celeste is such a fool! However, of course you can't help it, and it is extremely honorable of you to tell me at once, and not make a tool of me as you could so easily have done. You, see, my dear, I am utterly unaccustomed to rough it by myself, as these dreadful, independent, self-reliant Northern ladies do. My husband is not dead six months, and he used to do everything—he and the blacks; I never had to even purchase a ribbon for myself, he did it all, or to pick up my own handkerchief, they were always on hand, a score of them. But now, oh, dear!" and she dissolved in weak-self-pitying tears. "But you will cross with me. That is enough for the present," she resumed in a minute. "I am overcome with fatigue of examining applicants, and will put off the evil day, now I have got you, until we are settled in London. Come with me at once, for we start to-morrow at noon. By the way, what is your name?"

Monica was prepared for this question.

"My name is Monica Rivers," she answered adding her mother's surname to her own. She had decided not to enter Mr. Derwent's house bearing her patronymic; she wished not to excite his attention until she had studied him well. And as she expected to gain access to his patrician mansion only in some menial character, she had no object now in assuming any name that she did not intend to use throughout the whole season of her retributive visit in England.

And that was how she crossed the Atlantic and overcame the first obstacle presented to her.

"A good omen," she told herself as she hurried to her boarding-house for her slender belongings, reflecting on the special Providence which had sent her in the way of a lymphatic and heedless character like Mrs. Frothingham; any one else would have been sure to demand references, ask definite questions, pry into her concerns, and generally make it impossible for her to retain her own secrets without suspicion and eventual rupture. But Mrs. Frothingham was possessed of as little worldly wisdom as a girl of ten; given to fancies, too thankful to lean on anything that offered calm enduring strength, and pleased with Monica's refined face, respectful manners, and simple honesty.

The little party went amicably off together; and Monica, standing on the crowded deck of the mammoth steamer, under the drearily falling winter rain the next day at noon, and watching the wedge-shaped city lessening in the distance, till the pale gray of Castle Garden was all that was visible, felt one anguished heart-wrench, as if she had done something irrevocable; and then, looking down at the wee sparkling face of her tiny charge, smiled away her forebodings, and thanked Heaven for her traveling companions.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MASTER OF DORNOCH-WEALD.

THE hamlet of Dornoch, among the hills and fastnesses of —shire, presented a picturesque enough aspect to the weary eyes of the young woman who entered it one gusty evening in the end of March, on the top of the country stage-coach, which carries the mails and passengers from the railway station, Linnhe, twenty miles off.

She had been traveling all day, in steamer, rail-car, and coach; she was not yet completely recovered from the enervating effects of her rough and sea-sick passage across the Atlantic, and the tiresome swimming of the head consequent on the sea voyage, had not yet left her.

But Monica Derwent possessed a prompt and determined spirit not to be delayed or discouraged by anything short of impossibility.

Having left the quiet nest of her sheltered girlhood, she found her wings both broad and strong, and was now swooping on swift pinion, like an eagle on its prey.

Arrived in Liverpool, it had not taken her long to discover where to find the information she required, that is, the address of Otto Derwent. The peerage was handed her by the shopman; leafing it rapidly over she soon had her small tapered finger-tip upon this passage, under the illustrious heading:

"FELTRIE, FAMILY NAME DERWENT.

"Otto Montacute Derwent, Master of Feltrie, Hoarshire, family seat, Dornoch-Weald, —shire. Born July 10, 1827. Only son of Copeland Moray Derwent, Master of Feltrie, Hoarshire. Appointed chief secretary to the Government of —, 1854; resigned 1860. Created lord lieutenant of —shire, 1860, and still serves. Never married. Next to kin and heir expectant, Geoffrey Kilmyre, eldest son of Marina Derwent, sister to Otto Montacute, married to Salter Kilmyre, manufacturer, Cornlea."

Monica flushed so vividly over the words, "never married," as she bent her graceful little head over the page, that the vulgar cockney bookseller tried to peep over her shoulder to see what on earth the young woman was reading that excited her so; but she closed the book, quietly thanked him for his civility in letting her see it, and glided out. And two hours afterward she was aboard a coast steamer, borne over the chopping, sickening coast waves, North, death-sick, and weary beyond words, but inexorably resolved to continue on her way until she stood face to face with Otto Montacute Derwent, Master of Feltrie and Dornoch-Weald.

All night surging with roar and grind and tremor through the swashing sea; at gray dawn whirling in a cold, contracted rail-car through flat green meads and wet black earth-furrows, where the ridged snow still lies; up, up, further and further North, at midday standing, dizzy and faint on the platform

of the station at the market town of Linnhe, the nearest to Dornoch village; then set high in air by the side of the brown, parchment-skinned, hairy coach-driver, whose gnarled hands grasp the "ribbons" of his four enormous spankers scientifically, and whose conversation consists in sulphurous oaths delivered to his steeds, and now, at last she is rolling through the roughly-macadamized principal street of Dornoch, her glittering eyes straining away over the heads of the quaintly-dressed villagers at the lordly turrets and shining windows of her father's home.

It lies, perhaps a mile beyond the last thatch-roofed cot of Dornoch; it is set proudly upon a gentle eminence, not so steep or embowered in trees as to conceal from these questioning eyes the velvet expanses of its rolling parks and broad garden-acres; the grand house of Dornoch-Weald, with its encircling pleasure-grounds, occupies a circular tract of some two hundred acres in the heart of a forest, in which may be seen some of the finest and oldest timber in England.

This forest, with its preserves, its charcoal fields, and its stretching wealth of wood, as well as the whole village of Dornoch, are described in the title-deeds of the estate of Dornoch-Weald; Feltrie, the other estate, and the older, from which he derives his distinctive title of "Master," lies in another county, not only far removed from Derwent's residence here, but left to decay, ever since one of the gay Derwents of the last century filled the sacred halls with rout and lasciviousness, and was finally murdered in the banqueting hall by one of his vile companions.

The stage-coach sweeps up to the broad front of an inn, over the wide-set door of which a vast shield-shaped sign is swinging, displaying on its gilded surface the escutcheon of Derwent, some mythological monster ramping amid hieroglyphic signs, with the legend underneath,

"DARE NOT DERWENT."

Mine host emerges, pipe in mouth, and cap askew; helpers run from the stables; lights twinkle in the windows of the inn; uncouth men and boys in mole-skins and corduroys, loiter into the yard from the street; and everybody gazes with all his eyes as the taciturn coach-driver helps down his only passenger from the box-seat, and hands her a slim little traveling sachel, which, with a small box, comprises all her belongings.

She stands silent a moment, looking attentively about her; she has thought to find quiet lodgings in the village for a few days, until she can effect her purpose unobtrusively; but by the appearance of the rude, half-civilized huts she has passed, and the surly or stolid villagers, she begins to realize that she may find this impossible.

"For the Weald, miss?" inquired a voice at her elbow; the landlord was scrutinizing her with all the hungry curiosity of one whose glimpses of the outer world are few.

"No, I expected to be able to find some sort of lodgings in the village," she replied, in her quiet, yet crisp and sufficiently independent tone, her accent sufficiently un-English to mark her alien extraction; "can you direct me to a suitable house?"

The man stepped back a pace in order to have a look at her, from the crown of her plain little black silk hat to the tip of her slender shoe; then he passed his vacant globular orbs slowly around the circle of onlookers, as if for inspiration.

"A furriner!" muttered one voice in the quickly gathering crowd.

"Looks like one o' they nun-women," suggested a second.

"Where can she come from, for to look to Dornoch for hotels and the like?" grumbled a third.

"Let me step inside, please; I shall take supper here," said the object of remark, anxious to escape from these candid expressions of the people's opinions; and thus set in a path mine host mechanically lumbered on in it; with a dumb-struck air he led her into the inn parlor, and set her by the hearth upon which a grand fire of fagots was roaring and crackling, and sending its glimmering reflections all up and down the wainscoted walls and the burnished brazen ornaments on the rude shelves.

She sunk upon the broad wooden settle with a long sigh; she was so weary that everything she saw in this strange new world looked dream-like and unreal, and she herself was beginning to seem another being, with nothing left of the original Monica Derwent save a wound which quivered in pain when she remembered her mother.

She was left alone while the landlord strolled out to regain his senses and to find his spouse. She tried to stagger to the window for another gaze at the turrets of Dornoch-Weald, but her limbs refused to bear her, and she curled down again in the corner of the cushioned dais, and soon succumbed to the resistless influence of slumber's three handmaidens, Weakness, Weariness, and Warmth.

Dim and distant came the tramp and bustle of the noisy inhabitants of the "Dornoch Arms;" mine host lumbered in with his wife at his heels, a tall stalwart female like a grenadier, who approached to shake her guest roughly awake, but was arrested by the mute refinement of the small pale face and the long silken lashes, and who then busied herself clatteringly about the supper-table; two chambermaids slipped in under cover of asking for orders from their imperious mistress, but with the real intention of slaking their curiosity about the "young wench" who talked "half furren," and ordered round her like a duchess; the bay of dogs came on the light evening breeze, and sent mine host, his wife, and the maids scattering in all directions in mad haste; the clang of horses' iron-plated hoofs sounded galloping nearer and nearer; the court-yard filled with noise and clamor, voices shouting, loud laughter, the oc-

casual whinny of a favorite steed or the whimper of a wounded hound; then heavy footsteps came, with the jangle of spurs and slash of hunting ratan, across the stone hall, and two men stood before the sleeping girl lying on the settle, in the bright blaze of firelight.

"Pon my life—see here, Rufus!" exclaimed a deep rough voice, "what d'ye suppose *this* means?" "Means the advent of something spicy to our hunting dinner, by Jove—a regular snow-drop—but hush—" replied another voice in a cautious undertone.

Another step (Monica thought she was dreaming all this) another step came slowly and majestically across the oak floor as it is in dreams; it seemed to be a long, long time in coming; so long indeed that she waited for it with gradually intensifying curiosity; at last it seemed to halt between the two speakers, and in a deep silence (she went on dreaming) a pair of burning eyes were fastened upon her face.

And she awoke to lift up her own eyes and to find this true.

It was with a singular shock that Monica first met those orbs. They were large, the pupils dilated and intensely black, with a surrounding iris like a ring of fire; well cut, widely-open eyes, and sheltered by eyebrows of jetty black, drawn straight across a brow as white and cold as monumental marble, and deeply depressed half-way between the eyebrows and the hair. At the moment that Monica fixed hers upon these strange eyes, she caught a look, indescribably wild, and accompanied by a sudden paleness of all the features; fascinated, horrified, she did not move; she felt a ghastly constriction of the heart, and her breath coming in painful gasps, as if from under a mountain.

A smothered laugh broke the weird spell; the eyes released hers; their owner bowed with majestic dignity and turned away.

One of the young men in tarnished scarlet hunting-coats had touched his comrade's elbow, and was endeavoring to stifle his merriment.

They were both glancing from her, as she sat up with flaming cheek and but half-aroused faculties, in her corner, to the owner of the eyes. She, too, in all her embarrassment, gazed earnestly after this person as he strode to the window and leaned his arm on the sash, and his head on his arm.

He was tall, portly; his fine jet-black hair waved in careless locks over his broad pale forehead and fell about his coat-collar; his hands as they gleamed in the fire-light, seemed white as a woman's, and broad and muscular as an athlete's; his costume was a well-worn hunting one, richly appointed, but utterly devoid of ornament other than the necessary items of handsome hunting-gear.

The two younger men, having decorously banished their chuckling amusement at the episode of the young lady's spellbound stare into the elder man's eyes, strolled outside to cross-question the landlord; and Monica recovered her composure, resettled herself in her corner, and turned a quiet look upon the fire.

Suddenly the stranger wheeled, saw her sitting calmly there, and strode with a firm, quick tread to the opposite side of the wide hearth-stone; where, with his elbow resting on the tall mantle-shelf, and his gaze also turned quietly on the fire, he stood motionless as a statue, and not unlike one of the grand old Knights Paladin, with frame worthy of the Herculean achievements of those rude days of glory.

Without looking again at him, Monica mutely made up her mind that this was one of the lords or landholders of the neighborhood, and wondered whether Mr. Otto Derwent had been at the hunt, and whether he also would come into the inn parlor.

"I shall know him when he comes," she mused with a swelling heart. "He must be about forty-three now, a stout, middle-aged man, with mixed hair, and a hard or sinister expression."

On and on went her thoughts; her fine face contracted, her soft red mouth compressed. Fire shot from her frowning eyes; she was looking along her vengeful future, lit up by the torch of her mother's wrongs. She forgot the stranger standing opposite her; she forgot the quaint old English inn; she saw nothing, felt nothing, but the baleful flicker of her chosen mission.

The sudden scratching and scurrying of dog-feet across the slippery floor roused her; she started violently and half rose—for the stranger's face was within three feet of hers, and his strange eyes were riveted upon her in breathless, wondering scrutiny.

"Stop. Excuse me, young lady, but—who are you?" said he.

There was something in the low iron voice, as in the wide, vivid eye, which overawed and mastered her.

As if in a dream she sunk back again, never feeling the cold, sharp nose of the hound as it traveled over her hands in suspicious examination, nor realizing the eccentricity of the question; and said:

"Monica Rivers."

She saw the eager expectancy of his gaze quench like a light blown out, a moment of blank vacancy, then a shrinking of the dilated pupil, and a sudden glare of fury and contempt, succeeded by a scowl of curiosity, which remained.

"Rivers? May I trouble you to explain *what* Rivers? You speak like an American."

How did he know that so instantly? Her accent was pure enough, and fortunately unmarred by any provincialism or dialectism whatever. How had he guessed? A dark thought shot into her mind.

"I am an American," she replied, meeting his frowning inquisition with a sudden flash of repulsion, "and my family is entirely unknown. I am a Rivers—that is all I know."

"Be explicit," said he, in a lower and yet somehow, a more iron and domineering tone. "Who is

your mother?—your father? From what part of the United States have you come? Answer me, child. I have, perhaps you may find, some right to demand information on these points from you."

Monica started to her feet, panting and agitated. For a moment she thought, wildly: "Yes, this is he, and he has, in his unearthly clairvoyance, discovered me."

But a second thought resolved her to force the recognition from him, rather than herself avow it; so she answered, proudly:

"My parents are gone; my father"—this she said with a passing malice, waiting to see him wince—"my father was only a village schoolmaster, my mother a lace-maker, and I was brought up in poverty and sorrow, to be a village schoolmistress, as the height of my ambition; New York was my birth-State."

She was describing, as closely as she dared, the very circumstances of her mother, as Otto Derwent had come upon her twenty years ago; and she had the satisfaction of seeing him wince and pale, and gnaw his lip with a fierce self-repression.

"The name of the village, girl?" he demanded.

And she named her mother's village, reckless, in the sinister glee of her first triumph over him.

"Addiscombe."

The hunter drew up, gazed at her for a few moments with a stricken, astonished air; then, with a mechanical bend of the head, he strode from the room.

As he went out, the hostess came in, giving him wide room to pass, and an old-fashioned courtesy down to the floor.

"Who is that man?" cried the young girl, with a voice as high and clear as silver bells.

"That," answered the woman, reverently—"oh, that is our squire, the Master of Dornoch-Weald. I'll warrant you never saw a kinkier gentleman where-soever you come from."

And Monica, heedless of the implied invitation to confide her nationality to the mistress of the "Dornoch Arms," turned away with a very peculiar smile, "that kind of made me creep like," as Dame Hicks said afterward, when these apparently trivial events were talked of over the length and breadth of the British Isles.

CHAPTER V.

WAITING AND SEEING.

AND that was Otto Derwent, her father!

With blazing cheeks the girl sat and thought of him, scanning again, with mental gaze, the tall, stalwart figure, the proud, picturesque countenance, the dominant manner, the dashing, courageous, bon-comrade style of the man who had let his wife perish alone in Loangerie.

How lightly his sorrow sat upon him! Why, her mother had looked at least ten years older when she died!

As Monica played with the fried ham and eggs and weak tea served to her by Dame Hicks, she plied that personage with questions that set her voluble tongue wagging continuously, and rendered the stranger lady so much more interesting a guest than the dozen of hungry hunters who reveled in the big hall, that she passed over these magnates to her husband, and devoted herself to the one lone little girl.

And Monica, with her white hand upholding her cheek, and her dark glimmering eyes fastened full upon the dame's raw-boned face, lured her on and on, till she had told all she knew about Dornoch-Weald and its noble master.

According to Mrs. Hicks, "the master," as she delighted to call him, was so obstinate in his celibacy, and withal so brilliant, fascinating and popular among the ladies, that the highest in the land had as good as offered herself to him, while all the county ladies, belles and heiresses, as well as peeresses in their own right, were breaking their necks after him, without the smallest reward.

"For a gay man, an' a jovial liver," said the old woman, "he's that queer about marryin', the Lord only knows what he means for to do for an heir; him that hates his nephew, Geoffrey Kilmyre, fit to shoot him—him as used for to fairly worship the lad! And in my opinion, as well as the whole countryside's, a properer man, and a gallanter, never stepped across Dornoch-Weald threshold; a bit harum-scarum maybe, but, Lord! that's better than foxin' and wigglin' like snakes around the master's heels, like the next after him again—I mean them two rogues as were here a minute ago with him, Rufus an' Gavaine Marshall. Geoffrey, ye see, 's a right down Derwent, as why shouldn't he, bein' the master's own sister's child; whereas them scum aren't nothin' but distant relatives, ever so far removed, sons of—would ye believe it, nothin' but a tailor! and with neither the souls nor the bodies of our Derwents, God bless the race!"

"And he—Mr. Derwent, I mean—is he kind to people—a good man?" demanded the listener, disdainfully.

"Humph! I dunno what may your ideas of good be! He suits us—lets us a-be, and that's what a single man should," retorted the innkeeper's wife. "If the young woman as has been hanging on these ten year at the Weald would only keep her nose out of our consarns, like the master does, she'd suit us better too, I'll wager."

"Who is she?"

"Oh, another far-off relation; at least she says so, an' has been a-tryin' for to ketch the master ever since she got out of short clothes—for a scheming viper! But he don't see it, he! he! he!—an' so they say up at the hall that of late she's set her cap for young Master Geoffrey, an' that she's in a fair way of hookin' him, too. But it'll be a sad day for Dornoch when Godiva Montacute gets to be mistress of the Weald."

"Young, you say?"

"Jest of age, miss, twenty-one, and as sly a serpent as ever crawled. It's my opinion, an' I don't care who hears me say so, that she's that mad at the master for never lookin' her way, that she'd stick her bodkin in his heart, any day, if she had a chance; an' if ever anything amiss do happen to him, I'll know who done it."

And the giantess nodded her great head gloomily, gazing with a disgusted frown into vacancy.

Monica felt a singular stir at the heart, and a quick breathless craving to see this woman face to face. Yet, although she was spoken of as the enemy of the Master of Dornoch-Weald, it was not kindred feeling that animated the American girl, who had come here in the character of an avenger.

"Go on! tell me more," said she, settling herself with yet deeper attention, to the dame's great gratification, for she loved to declaim on the affairs of her betters. "Where is Geoffrey Kilmyre, and what?"

"Oh, he's a rovin' blade. He don't trouble the Weald much, especially since the master turned him out of Dornoch for wanting to marry a poor gal as was governess in the parson's family."

"Ah! cried Monica, derisively, "the Master of Dornoch-Weald does not like poor girls, does he?"

"Well, this 'un weren't much, anyhow, an' who but a mad devil like Master Geoffrey would think o' settin' the like, with nayther blood nor beauty, at the head of the table where princesses wanst sat?"

"Well, did the young man assert his independence, and marry her in spite of his uncle, or did he prove a craven and abandon her for the sake of his uncle's wealth?"

"Land! how your eyes do shine, miss! Did he marry Nell Wyvern, say you? No, for, as good luck 'ud have it, she showed herself up in time, for the bold, brazen hussy she was, an' run off with parson's eldest son, a captain in the guards, whenever she found out that her rich lover 'ud lose everything if he married her; an' she not even expectin' to marry Tom Grindon. Ugh! Master Geoffrey may thank his stars for his escape. It broke the heart of parson's wife, as sweet a lady as ever trod in Dornoch's; she died in a month; an' parson hisself, he have never held up his poor head since; for the lad was a good son till she come to blacken his soul. She's in Lunnun this very day, a-ridin' in her kerriage among all the other brazen wenches, an' Tom Grindon's forgot ages ago, and gone to the dogs. Well, Master Geoffrey wor well rid of her; but for all that he never forgave his uncle for standing atween them on account of the gal's low birth; so he's very seldom at the Weald now, but keeps hisself to his own big, lonesome house in Cornlea, an' meanwhile them reptiles, the Marshalls, keep close by the master's ear, an' Satan only knows what lies they tell about our young master; and that other fox, Godiva Montacute, keeps a-writin' constant to Master Geoffrey, drawin' him, fine as a wire, into her net, though how she means to get the property for him ag'in' two such imps as them Marshalls, is past me. Well, well, thank God, the master's as hale an' hearty as any one of 'em yet, an' can ride to hounds with the foremost; it may be a many years afore anybody 'll get into his shoes, an' the good Lord grant it will."

And with this devout aspiration the landlady departed in response to a call from the dining-room, from whence came the jolly racket and turbulence of a hunt dinner.

And Monica once more sunk deep into reverie, with wondering heart questioning the near future.

She was soon afterward conducted to her bedroom, situated in a distant part of the wide-spread rambling cottage, but for all that, not quite out of hearing of the noisy party in the dining-room; and she passed the long, cold, gusty night between waking visions of sinister foreboding, and slumbering trances of nameless terror, till the dim breaking of day, when all grew death-still and she slept profoundly. With her waking came perplexities.

Unless she applied, under some good pretext, at the parsonage for lodgings, there was not a house in Dornoch open to her; for the most part the inhabitants were wretchedly poor. Leasing small patches of land upon which they raised green stuffs for the Linnhe market, and crammed into infinitesimal cottages, eight or twelve of a family; ignorance, vice, and brutal suspicion of strangers seemed to be their ruling characteristics.

"Like people, like master," thought the intelligent American girl, scornfully; she was fresh from her own trim, thriving little village, where every soul could at least read, and where the poorest cotter could mingle with his fellows, a rational being.

What curse was hanging over this people, that they were so imbruted?

Nothing but an unhappy and reckless lord, whose bitter conservatism and galling pride of race had taught him to look upon his tenants as naught but miserable serfs to till his lands and to crouch at his foot as their natural lord and master!

For the Master of Dornoch-Weald was said through all the country to be the proudest man within the Riding; prouder by far of his ancient lineage than many a high peer, more newly ennobled; his private character was a strange mixture of princely *bonhomie* toward his equals, and icy impenetrability toward all, high or low, who ventured to tread too close to his real nature.

Monica was obliged to hire a room at the inn; she shrunk from the task of dissimulation with all the repulsion of a high-toned nature, and felt it impossible to intrude under false pretenses upon the stricken man at the parsonage; it was only her father whom she could contemplate deceiving without one pang of compunction.

She took a room at the "Dornoch Arms" for a few weeks, and bestirred herself to obtain entrance under some plausible excuse, into the Weald. She

gave out to the inn people that she had come to their village among the woods for change of air, her pale and emaciated appearance suggesting instantly recent illness among the ruddy and robust Northern peasants; and she took care to make it known that if the air agreed with her, she would be thankful to get some post at the Mansion House, being too poor to live idle upon her money.

But the days passed, and nothing came of her stay, except that she made herself thoroughly familiar with the grounds of Dornoch-Weald, as well as for miles around among the forests.

And then fate gave her her will; a door opened where she least looked for it, and the way was clear.

She had not caught another glimpse of Mr. Derwent; neither had she seen the woman who now divided her thoughts with him—Godiva Montacute, the wily connection. The brothers Marshall she often saw and eluded; they made a habit of riding past the inn every day, and of stopping to call for a stirrup-cup of mine host's nut-brown ale, in the hope of snatching another glimpse of the pale and lustrous-eyed stranger lady, whom they had discovered asleep on the wooden settle.

She had successfully avoided not only them, but all the cavaliers at the Mansion; she was cautious as to when and where she took her walks, and confined herself to her room as long as they loitered about the inn.

This reserve piqued their curiosity; they vowed to "have her out of her hole," as they put it, and haunted her.

At this time the great house was thronged with a merry company. Not only sportsmen filled its spacious walls and vaulted chambers, but ladies from the *beau monde*, bright, beautiful, young and illustrious ladies, might be seen sauntering in dainty guise through the budding garden-beds, and the mossy paths of the home-woods.

Sometimes they flashed by on horseback, attended by the youngest and gayest of the cavaliers; sometimes they drove, a merry cavalcade, in the master's open carriages, through the quaint little village, to some point of interest in the neighborhood, gazing curiously about them as they passed the wretched hutsches with their squalid, beast-like inhabitants; but Godiva Montacute was never among these; she seemed to confine herself within the walls of Dornoch-Weald, as one with some watch to keep.

Monica came to think of this unseen woman who hated the Master of Dornoch-Weald, eating his bread the while, with superstitious dread; she was always straining to catch a glimpse of her.

One morning she reached, in the course of her ramble in the forest facing the Weald, a charming little dingle, where the gray rocks peeped through velvet mosses, and the fresh young curls of the bracken interlaced, with the shooting grasses, the gnarled roots of the giant oaks; silver-stemmed birches, dusky thorn, and tasseled poplars, stretched away like solemn cathedral columns into the dim recesses of the wood; and a fair bud-fringed gap revealed the Mansion straight fronting the girl, as she leaned among the young spring verdure against a granite boulder, half-lost amid the shadows and the intricate tracery of naked boughs.

As usual, Monica had brought a book with her; it was not one calculated to enchain her interest much, it is true, for, in default of any books whatever in her present abode, she had obtained permission from the sexton of the little Chapel to use the library of theological works which moldered in the vestry, and these volumes chanced to be of the driest and most dogmatic type; so she had also provided herself with a piece of lace-work, which she made almost as exquisitely as her mother, and with more originality of design, and on which she now built some hopes of making a subsistence.

She was weary with a long walk, and sat in a half-dream, her abstracted gaze fixed upon those distant turrets; when the quiet rustle of some light trailing thing over last year's fallen leaves attracted her attention.

She turned in every direction, seeking the cause, but nothing was visible coming through that mist of crossing twigs, with its slight veiling of just peeping green; then the rustling stopped, and she heard a quick, firm step, and a clear merry whistle, coming shrilling up from the valley below. It was answered from the point where the rustling had ceased, by the warbling of a bird, so very cleverly and deftly executed that Monica had not the slightest suspicion that it could be anything else, until the rustling began again, and standing up, she saw, coming apparently toward her nook, a tall woman in a vapory sort of pale gray gown, that scarcely showed through the silvery grayness of the trees, only that it moved, and that something copper-red shone on the head of it, and something roseate white where the face might be.

As she looked, not doubting but that the lady had seen her and was coming to speak to her, the firm step all the while coming springing up and up from the valley, the lady stood still, behind the enormous girth of a centenarian oak, and a gentleman sprang beside her.

As the two met, Monica, who saw them in profile, though the great tree hid them completely from the windows of the Mansion, perceived the tall, slim lady put out two long white hands with an impulsive grace, which the gentleman, when he was up to her, gathered quickly in one of his, shook them gayly, and dropped, throwing himself back then against the trunk, while he gazed at her in silence for perhaps a minute, his riding-cap in his hand, and his shining brow lit by the clear morning beams.

And Monica, who could see his face distinctly, being possessed of unusually long sight, breathed a mechanical sigh of pleasure; for it was so beautiful, not only in proud, pure contour, rich and manly coloring, and grace of outline, but in the heartfelt

sincerity and ingenuousness of the soul that looked forth from the clever, searching eyes, that her very heart was satisfied for once, and ere ever he had uttered one word in her hearing, her soul assented to all that was in his nature, fiber to fiber answering.

"Rare and fair as ever, Godiva! Anxiety only makes you lovelier, I protest, my brave champion," were the first words spoken.

"Oh, Geoffrey! GEOFFREY! GEOFFREY!" were her words in answer.

Monica felt her heart stand still; these were the two who ought to be of the utmost importance in the world, to her, after Otto Derwent, for they were the candidates for heirship of his wealth—her rivals.

Godiva Montacute and Geoffrey Kilmyre stood at last before her—before HER, the unknown daughter of their patron and uncle.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SIREN OF THE WOOD.

MISS MONTACUTE had uttered her greeting in a low impassioned tone, and with a movement as if she would have drawn the young man most impetuously to her bosom, a movement which he did not respond to, as he leaned in an attitude of perfect indolent grace against the old black tree-trunk; then she fell back a step, crossing her pale hands on her breast, with her bare head drooping, and the burning gold of her waving hair glittering under the sun, for her broad-brimmed country hat was slung over one arm by long floating ribbons of palest azure.

She looked very, very lovely and stately as she drooped so; her height was majestic, her figure lithe and willowy, with an easy gliding grace, like the curving undulations of a bending blade of grass, or a twining serpent; her face was purely oval, and creamy white, where it was not roseate of the purest carmine tint; in her tiny ivory ear beamed a star-shaped azure periwinkle-blossom, in porcelain, or some pretty ware, a spray of the same fastening the transparent illusion scarf that softly muffled her throat, as white as it; oh! she was delicacy, demureness, modesty and tenderness personified, she who might, by right of her proud stature and noble beauty, have lifted herself toweringly above any man's insulting indifference, a very Cleopatra!

"You are glad to see me, then?" said Geoffrey Kilmyre, curiously regarding her. "In the name of Heaven, why, I should like to know?"

She stole a strange look at him; it was as if her eyes, concealed till then under the longest, richest red lashes Monica had ever seen, had emitted a white flash, like lightning in daylight; then they were hid again.

"Pardon me, Mr. Kilmyre, I have no right to presume to be either glad or sorry about you," she replied in a humble, innocent voice. "But if I was—I really couldn't help it—at least—oh, what a shame to put me on the witness stand this way!" she broke out in lovely confusion, and half turned away, pouting, yet smiling, like a very sweet unsophisticated child.

Monica had listened and looked thus far, too utterly carried out of herself by the suddenness of the double arrival to recollect the impropriety of so doing; she would now, having come a little to herself, inevitably have either called their attention to her proximity by some sound, or walked away, had not something in this last maneuver of the beautiful Godiva struck cold conviction of treachery to her soul. Conscious of this intuition, and of nothing else, she suddenly sat down again in her shadowed nook, and, completely sheltered by intervening rocks and branches from the most searching looks, prepared to overhear all that this woman had come there to say to Geoffrey Kilmyre. And now she could see neither of them; but the better could she listen.

"Do you know, blushes are vastly becoming to you, Lily-Maid," she heard the gay, yet rather mocking voice of the young man say next.

It was clear that whatever he might be to this lovely dependent on his uncle's bounty, she was nothing to him, nothing at least beyond the pleasant moment of her luring presence.

"Do you think so? Thank you!" murmured she softly, and Monica could see mentally the mock-maiden side glance and the evil shrewdness of the hidden heart of her as she said it.

"Well, you are a good little thing—I beg your pardon—little is scarcely the term to describe a woman of your majesty; but somehow you always seem to me babyish enough for the endearment, in spite of your six feet of statuesque perfection."

"Anything you say by way of endearment, Geoffrey, is precious—is, I should rather say, welcome to me; as you know, I have had little love in my life."

"Poor child! That's the way with most of us, I dare swear. However, I need not keep you out in this wilderness talking sentiment. Let's to business. You wrote for me, and here I am. What is it?"

"Oh, me! How sternly you can look at me! Did I do wrong to write you, Geoffrey? Indeed, it was out of the purest—"

"There—there—don't cry, dear soul. What under heaven have I said now, to stir up the pathos in your foolish little heart? For a large woman, and a rather sensible one, you are the veriest baby! There, that's right; you look more practical now. You were right enough in summoning me to Dornoch-Weald, if my uncle was in any trouble which I could avert. Little cause as he has shown me to waste filial duty upon him, I can't hear of his worries without at least wanting to offer my help. What is the matter?"

"Let me collect my reasoning faculties a moment, Mr. Kilmyre. I must not waste your time or forbearance getting out the matter in my own poor womanish way; wait one minute."

It was clear that the "Lily-Maid" required some

time to crush down the rage and mortification his careless words had roused in her; any woman would have recognized the anger which burned in those quivering, half-suppressed tones, and in the quick swish of her robe over the dead leaves as she passed to and fro.

Geoffrey Kilmyre evidently did not read these signs aright. After uttering a slight laugh at her closing words, the snap of a match and the curls of blue smoke rising over the spot where he stood betokened the serenity with which he had lit his cigar, and the careless nonchalance with which he meant to await the revelation his kinswoman had summoned him to hear.

Soon her promenade ended, and her voice sounded, low and delicate, through the ancient forest.

"Did you know that Rufus and Gavaine Marshall were here on a six weeks' visit?"

"By Jove! no! The Marshalls? What can the poor old fellow mean? How does his majesty get along with the sneaking curs? I'm bad enough—the son of a Cornlea cotton prince. But they, ye gods! scions of a tailor! Ha! ha! ha!"

Geoffrey's laugh, the laugh of an honest man, rung out merrily; its sarcasm could not make it even malicious.

"Hush, dear boy, hush!" came the suppressed voice of Godiva, and there was malignity-germ enough in her tones for both. "If any one should discover me under these circumstances—oh, I shudder at the consequences!" A pause. No one asked what consequences.

The delicate voice went on, with a metallic clink in it:

"Well, let me suffer if I must; I had rather suffer for you than curry favor with them for my own sake. I don't know how they contrived to be invited this time along with our other distinguished guests; certainly they were invited by Mr. Derwent, in due form, and are treated with as much consideration and respect as my Lord Drogheda himself; not a hint of their extraction, only that they are distant connections; and as they have been well, even showily educated, and appear to have mixed in good society, they make a good appearance, and no one would take them for anything else than gentlemen. They have been here three weeks now, and in that time they have contrived to become so necessary to Mr. Derwent, that he is never seen without one or the other of them at his heels. Of course in one way there is nothing wonderful in that, for ever since he resurrected them from obscurity on the occasion of your expulsion two years ago, he has kept up a correspondence with them, as well as visiting them now and again at their own homes. But now they are really his principal guests. Does he moot an excursion, there they are, ready with hand and head to take everything but the enjoyment off him; does he speak of ball or masque, who so ingenious and so adroit to bring it about, not only with success, but with a unique fancy and originality that flatters and charms him; does he wish for sentiment, call for Rufus and Gavaine; the muses, Rufus and Gavaine; the arts, Rufus and Gavaine; or, best of all, does he crave seclusion, no reason in the world why he should not indulge so intellectual a wish; are not Rufus and Gavaine here to conduct everything so cleverly, and yet so modestly, that not the most captious of the guests can miss their host? Ah, Heaven! when I watch these terrible men basking under his pleased and musing glance, and think of you thrust out, thought of with freezing coldness, never mentioned at all, and your very portrait turned to the wall, my heart turns in my bosom. I have dared to keep your memory alive, notwithstanding his frowns and angry, goading taunts—I dare no more—if you only guessed what he tortures me by saying—I, who know so little about money that I never can distinguish between pounds and shillings, who would serve you the same if you were really penniless as he seems to wish you were."

The narrator broke off with thick crowding sobs; they were so very naturally done, so convulsive, so eloquent of long and bravely-repressed sorrow and distress, that, by the low murmuring that next came through the wood, Monica guessed that the deluded Geoffrey was caressing her in some kind way, and whispering thanks and praises in her ear.

With all the scornful curiosity of a proudly genuine nature, that observes the full iniquity of a false and wicked one, she rose and looked.

For all her hard work, Godiva had only won the small triumph of Geoffrey's hand on her drooping head, which he was patting and stroking half absently.

"And so, fearing that they were on the high-road to supplant me in my uncle's will, you wrote for me to appear on the scene," said he, presently raising his comforting tones and returning to his place, the moment she had so far repressed her emotion as to return her handkerchief to her pocket. "And what did you expect me to do in self-defense, my dear?" he added, obviously more from curiosity to hear her idea than to obtain information on the important point.

"Do!" echoed she, almost sharply; "why, Geoffrey, is it you, who have so much at stake, who asks me, the humblest person in the house, and the least interested, what you should do?"

"My dear girl, do you know that you made rather a pertinent insinuation that last remark?"

"Eh? what can you mean?" muttered she, in some confusion.

"Oh, you didn't mean it at all, of course, you little goose; but it is just confoundingly true that you are the least interested party connected with this beastly business, because whoever of us, the tailor people or I, eventually turn out master of yonder mansion, you won't suffer; I don't forget Rufus Marshall's old penchant toward you; you see, you're safe."

"Oh, Geoffrey, Geoffrey! how little do you know poor, friendless Godiva Montacute!" sighed she, with great feeling. Monica had resealed herself, too much disgusted with her last sight of the lady to remain looking. "I shall never turn from your cause, dear, never desert your standard for theirs, were you to be disinherited to-morrow."

"Thanks, little girl; therein you show your warmth of heart and utter folly in charming unison. Indeed I don't think I ought to encourage you to revolt from the ruling powers, especially since it is really a matter that does not touch you in the least. I mean my well or ill fare. Drop me, little one; I shan't feel aggrieved. You've no right to turn your back upon a young, devoted and thriving suitor, for the sake of a poor unlucky devil who isn't even in love with you!"

How did she take that? Involuntarily Monica rose up to see; her foot slipped among the dry twigs and leaves with a faint and rustling noise, and the face of the young lady, which had been bowed on her bosom in her favorite attitude of infantile submission and sadness, flashed up with the remains of a fierce white scowl upon it, to listen, with dilated eyes and a sinister keenness in every strained feature. She did not see Monica, she looked obliquely past her, into the depths of the forest; and after a moment's breathless suspense, as the sound was not repeated, she turned eagerly to her companion.

"Some one may come; I dare not be seen by human eye communing with you, not only because of the proprieties, but for sake of your welfare. Should they hear—your uncle, I mean, or they too—that I was on such terms with you, they would conceal everything from me as from a spy, and I could not assist you at all. This is what I think you should do. Come boldly on a visit to your uncle; make some excuse; here is the list of guests at the mansion; if there's a soul among them you know, say you were encouraged to venture to your old home—put it so—to see him or her; once regain a footing, and gentleness and submission to his will in everything will soon bring you back all his good-will. He can't forget that you are of the blood, a true Derwent, while they—but, I must go, Geoffrey, indeed."

"And shall I stoop to these accursed dissimulations, do you think, girl?" demanded the young man, with biting contempt. "Not I! Let Derwent do as he likes with his wealth; I shan't defile my fingers groping in the mire after it! If the old fellow was in trouble, or ill, I might swallow my pride and come to him, but not for this reason. My good girl, I have always thought that your moral perceptions were rather blunt, but this—"

"Oh, don't rebuke me—don't!" sobbed the lady, in the most afflicted manner. "I have not had half time to present the case as it really is; I have thought only of your interests, and forgetting his altogether. You must come, and instantly, Geoffrey."

"Don't ask me again to sneak into my uncle's good graces, Godiva, or I shall never look on your face more," he burst forth haughtily.

"Wait—hear what I do ask," she retorted, in a tone that suggested clinched teeth and a raging heart. "Your uncle is in trouble, is ill, or I should never have dared to send for you, knowing that you would not come for self-interest alone; nor could I have asked you to come for self-interest alone. He is in trouble—for I don't trust these men—do you hear? I don't trust them near him, night and day, as long as self-interest actuates them."

"My God! is there—"

"Hush! hush!" panted she, in startling agitation; I would have given much not to have been obliged to tell you this; I know nothing, only that so very much depends upon Mr. Derwent's will, and after his will is made—on his death—that I tremble at the wonderful influence which these brothers have already gained over him, and the patient persistency with which they haunt him. Come, come and watch with me, Geoffrey, if you ever loved your poor kind uncle!"

Tears and sobs, quivering accents, pauses, hurry—no wonder if the young man gazed at his companion in utter shocked and unquestioning credence.

"You said, 'in trouble, and ill'—is he ill, Godiva?" asked he, urgently.

"He does his best to cheat us all," was the wily answer; "he goes as usual about all his usual pursuits; but I can see—who am watching with anguish—how changed he really is; how death-pale at times, what fluctuating spirits, no appetite, unnatural periods of frozen reverie, all watched with the horrid intensity of fate, by the brothers! And when his weary eyes light on the back of your portrait—such a wistful, yearning, grieved look—"

"Let me go; why did you not say all this at first?" cried Geoffrey, impetuously. "Good God, girl, you should have sent for me at the very beginning. My poor lonely old fellow! Heavens! what a brute I've been, to abandon him to any vile pack of fortune-hunters!"

"Go—go at once then—quick! I hear some one!" hissed Godiva, abruptly laying her hands on his shoulders, and fairly pushing him a few steps down the incline. He submitted to the motive power, and strode off under its impetus down the hill to the Weald.

Monica, still standing, with lynx eyes glued to the schemer, was debating with herself whether she should reveal her presence, curious to see the effect of such an unexpected occurrence upon Miss Montacute; when she perceived, by the lady's attitude of intent listening, as well as by her anxious consultation of the watch at her girdle, that some other person was expected.

By the wily craft on that fresh blush-rose face, and the care with which she took a long survey of her surroundings, Monica received an emphatic impression of the importance of witnessing the forthcoming interview as she had witnessed the last, and

further concealed herself by creeping off to the dusky hollow of an enormous decayed tree, half a dozen paces from her bowlder, where, comfortably propped in a sitting posture, with a mossy barricade of upheaved roots in front, she could both see and hear without the smallest danger of discovery.

She had scarcely composed herself, when the gray shadowy figure of the lovely Godiva passed into her line of vision, not half a dozen feet from her, and stopped dead still.

By the excitement on her smiling face, and the gracefully outstretched arms, Monica saw that this interview was of a more interesting nature even than the last, and waited in breathless suspense for the arrival of the other party to it.

She had not half a minute to wait; still standing in an attitude of perfect grace and elegance, exquisitely lightened in effect by the gracious smiles of welcome that wreathed the lovely scarlet lips, Godiva was joined by another young gentleman, who, however, did not content himself by a cool handshake, but took the lissom form boldly in his arms, and poured a shower of kisses on her ripe and answering lips.

Then he held her off at arm's length to look at her with fond admiration, and Monica beheld the features of the man whose laugh had awakened her as she slept on the wooden settle in the inn parlor—Rufus Marshall!

CHAPTER VII.

SATAN'S IMP.

"My Sweet!" were the first delighted words that broke the enraptured spell, uttered by the young man as he drew Godiva Montacute again to his breast, and pillowing her burnished head there, patted and smoothed it with trembling hand. "You are, after all, fond of me; don't deny it after this."

"I'm afraid I am, Rufus," breathed the siren, faintly, nestling up still closer with a fascinating little movement of shy love. "But, oh, dear! what good is it going to do either of us? You know I dare never marry you, dear, under existing circumstances!"

Rufus Marshall was a colorless, undersized young man of some twenty-nine years; his eyes were pale and small, the iris curiously flecked with orange flakes, which in moments of excitement, blending with the faint green of the ground-color, produced in them a green phosphorescence. His mustache was long, waxed at the tips and ivory white; his lips under it, thin, and sharp-drawn, wearing an expression of anxiety and avarice; his hair was almost as tintless as his mustache, and fell over a bony, contracted forehead in limp fine drifts like mist; he possessed high shoulders, was angular, ungainly, and, though fashionably dressed and carrying himself with trained propriety, reminded one constantly of his low extraction.

Beside him the aristocratic woman towered as some princess in disguise, before whom he might decently have bowed the knee in abject subjection, and doubtless would have done so, had he not obtained over her—the more shame to her superior organization—an ascendancy through the basest impulses.

"I had some trouble finding our trysting-tree," said Rufus, presently, when he was tired of the refreshment of kissing those luring lips, and he waved his short square hand toward Monica's tree. "I'm not so used to wildwoods as you, Loveliest; though, please God, I shall one day be lord of all we two look upon this moment, with you by my side as queen." And the wretch caught her to him again in a burst of undignified chuckling, for it could scarce be called, as he expressed it, triumph.

Monica could see the shiver of repulsion that passed through Godiva, who, however, took excellent care not to display it to him, replying with sweet softness:

"May it be so, dear Rufus, for what is to become of your poor Godiva if that dissolute half-demon, Kilmyre, rules as master? I shall be thrust out, adrift, penniless, friendless." She turned aside her head to weep.

"The deuce! We'll see about that!" snarled her lover, an elf-like malignity clouding his ignoble features. "So, Pretty, don't cry to spoil those darling eyes; there's two of us between you and such a fate. Happily, if I am all head, Gavaine is all hands; whatever I set him to do, backed by your pretty coaxings, whatever it is, d'ye see? he'll do it, and no trouble after."

Monica felt the hair on her head slowly prickle and rise, the blood recede to her heart in an awful throe.

What was this that was being spoken?

Had he not put a strange emphasis on the word "whatever?"

The sweep of her arm as she carried her hand to her face, to dash the mist from her vision and the oozing sweat from her brow, startled the pair; they turned with one accord their faces toward her, and she read in these two blanched and contracted visages—DEATH.

They did not see her; who knows what would have befallen Monica Derwent if they had?

"Nothing but an owl rustling in the hollow trunk," muttered Godiva mechanically; "go on. You were saying that Gavaine would do whatever we planned; yes, dear, I think he would, but fortunately we won't require his sort of service just yet; we shall try a little more of yours first."

"My girl, I'm at the end of my rope, I assure you," said Rufus, with an impatient shrug; "I thought you knew that, and that we were meeting here to concoct Gavaine's work."

"Oh, not yet—not quite yet"—shuddered Godiva, looking frightfully pale and craven; "give the old man one more chance."

Rufus Marshall stared inquisitively at his accomplice; evidently her mood puzzled him.

"Pon my life, Godiva, you sometimes mystify me completely," mumbled he, resentfully. "What's come over you now? The last word was to 'get out of this suspense at any cost!' And now when I come to discuss how to obey you, you show the white feather and cry quarter! What's in the wind, girl? Come, out with it!"

The insignificant little atomy snatched at the noble-looking woman by the arm, and twisted her round in a coarsely bullying manner that would justly have set her blood boiling, but so abasing is conscious guilt that she did not even dare to shake his rude clutch off, although every instinct in her delicately-bred nature shuddered in disgusted revolt, and she gnawed her rose-red lips almost black.

"There's nothing new 'in the wind,' as you call it, Rufus," she muttered, "and you need not be so harsh and cruel to me! I suppose I can't help it, but I would rather try anything, everything else first, before I let you proceed to—extremities. I have eaten his bread so long—"

"That you have," interrupted he, rudely, "and I only wonder what in thunder could have come between you that you could ever turn against the old fool. Certainly very few men in his position would have bothered about a poor relation like you, as he has done. What did he ever do, that turned you against him?"

Godiva crimsoned violently, over her very neck and ears, and the scowl of an evil spirit darkened over her face. Monica remembered the insinuation of the innkeeper's wife, that she had tried her arts on her benefactor to climb into the supreme place at the Weald as his wife, and had been openly rejected; the furious mortification and galling bitterness of Godiva's present expression showed her that here rumor had not lied. But Godiva's answer was far different in import.

"I suppose I must tell you," she meekly said; "but you have no real right to ask me any home questions, yet."

"Go on; no humbugging!" observed Rufus, an involuntary smirk of gratification softening his insolent stare.

"Well, if I must I must. He—he was so cruel about wanting to marry me off to a man I have always abhorred," she raised her face here to the crystal morning light with a strange quivering anguish upon it, a blending of pain, deadly vengeance, and grief, "to his nephew, you know—"

"What! Geoffrey Kilmyre?" roared Rufus, setting blood-red with fury and jealousy; "did that dog ever dare to look at you?"

"Hush! What does it matter? I would never have married him, even to save my life; I had seen you first," said the traitress.

"But, say, did he ever make love to you?" muttered Rufus, doggedly. Godiva cast a keen glance upon the lowering murderous face and boldly answered:

"To tell the truth, no. I believe he was just as anxious to get rid of me as I was of him. You've heard and said enough about that affair with the clergyman's governess, Nellie Wyvern, to guess the reasons for that. But Mr. Derwent's heartless persistence in this matter turned my very soul. He could have so willingly sacrificed me to save his favorite from ruin he was bringing upon himself, no matter what I might feel! And of course when I resisted, he never forgave me. I have lived here on sufferance ever since, I who used to queen it as if I had been his own daughter!"

"Or wife," grinned Rufus with a sly leer that disclosed the maddening fact that he knew more than she had bargained for of the true reasons for her hate against her patron; and had merely been goading her to action by the reference; "why didn't he marry you himself and done with it?"

For one moment the young lady faced him with that white flash of fury like a blaze of lightning by daylight; then she crushed back her feelings with a baleful strength and resolution which boded ill for any unhappy soul who might have earned her hatred.

"Why indeed!" she murmured, carelessly; "I suppose if he had cared to do it he could have won my affection, as he had the charge of me ever since I was ten years old. But it did not occur to him, and certainly not to me. However, that's nothing to our purpose, is it? No, Rufus, I don't want you to proceed to extremities quite yet; for one reason, how can anything be done while the house is full?"

"Tush! that's our best chance," returned he, dropping his odious leer for a gloomier expression; "we are asked here for six weeks—three of 'em are gone and our work is not yet half done. We must hasten through with it, under cover of these thirteen strangers, all of whom will share in the suspicion of foul play with us two, if there is any, which I'll go bail there won't be, if my head does not fail me. Trust me for clean-cut head!"

"What do you propose?" muttered Godiva, her eyes on the ground.

"Nothing yet; I want you to help me to devise a plan. You've been sharp as a razor, and quick as a rat thus far, and I'm sure you can help now if you want to. The will is made, Rufus and Gavaine Marshall are named co-heirs, with a large bequest to his beloved relative, Godiva Montacute. His nephew Geoffrey was never in such vile repute as he is now, thanks to my constant prayers on his behalf. Ha! ha! which give me such an excellent opportunity to enumerate his incredible iniquities and insolent revilings of his uncle; Derwent will never again be worked up to such a pitch of indignation against Kilmyre, who may turn compunctious and come back any day, to the utter ruin of all our schemes; for all we can do is but a passing influence, which one sight of him will dispel; don't you see, my girl, that we must strike while the iron is hot?"

"But your acquaintanceship with him is such a new thing—"

"All the better for us. Who would believe that we could gain an ascendancy over such a man as Derwent in such a short time? Come, help me."

"How can I?" muttered she, turning paler.

"You haven't lived for ten years in his daily presence without knowing all about his habits, his constitution, his little mental traits, and so on. Through these you can suggest some safe idea."

"I scarcely see how; put any questions; I shall answer what I can."

"Well, about his habits. Has he any out-of-the-way habit that might be twisted to our advantage, should we wish him to—to be suddenly found?"

"Yes—I know—. He does not walk in his sleep; he does not drink to excess. He has no extraordinary habits whatever that I know of."

"Hem. Let me see. Never wanders about remote parts of the domains at queer hours, eh? Nor sits up nights in that library of his with the windows gaping on the lawn? No? Well, let's examine his health. Always has been as we see him, hale and strong?"

"Always. His life is so intelligently arranged, just enough physical exercise, just enough mental—that he has not an ailment that I have ever heard of. He is a calm man, no consuming passions, temperate in everything, tranquil; content, I should say, if ever man was so. No, there is no suggestion to be got out of his health."

Monica, the unknown daughter of the man so described, in spite of the crawling pity and horror with which she heard him discussed by these two embryo murderers, felt here a sudden uprising of the heart against him; remembering the hard and piteous life of his abandoned wife, was it not natural that she should wince from the serene picture of his?

Meantime Rufus was smothering execrations on the wise Master of Dornoch-Weald.

"If it mattered to nobody he'd be drinking himself dead," he snarled, "or walking on the roof every stormy night. Well, let's hear about his mental peculiarities."

"He has none."

"Con—found it! He *must* have some, girl."

"Perhaps—I know of none. Suggest."

"Has he no superstition—no belief in some old family wraith?"

"Ha! ha! ha! How little you know that lucid, powerful mind! No, certainly not."

"No antipathy—to fruit—flower—state of weather—peculiar character? Think, Godiva, think hard! Out of any one of these I might weave my purpose."

"No, no, no. Yet—stay—has he not *imagination*—a most vivid and original imagination? Yes! And, added to it, a peculiar susceptibility of organization. Yes, he has that."

"I scarcely understand. Instance."

"Well, he is one of those ultra sensitive people, that if one got him to believe himself ill of a fatal disease—or poisoned—or infected with a plague—I think he would actually die, not of fear, but of the vividness of his realization."

"Don't say any more—let me think," muttered Rufus in breathless excitement; and he plunged his hands deep into his pockets, dropped his narrow head upon his sunken chest, and went round and round under the trees in a circle, kicking the dry leaves up with his ill-shaped feet, anything but a dignified figure to be watched by the lowering eyes of his accomplice.

Monica, in her hiding-place, was biting her lips and clenching her hands to keep from screaming or fainting in her horror; and yet how strangely peaceful seemed the silvery shimmer of this morning under the lace-work of boughs, with the turrets of Weald peering through the vista!

How fatally fair this woman—how impishly crafty this man!

Could any mortal stop their intended crime more than he might mar the inexorable beauty of the morn?

Monica writhed in sickening agony. She had come here, she too, with vengeance in her heart against Otto Derwent. Heavens! was she in the same boat with these demons?

He who had been clasped in her mother's arms—her father—foully murdered.

"Oh, God—let me save him!" went up from the daughter's soul in a mute cry, and then a great calm fell upon her, and she cleared the mist from her fainting eyes, and looked again.

The guilty ones were facing each other once more; she white, quivering, the very picture of terrified evil—he corpse-like and contorted, with a fearful wizard-like exultation on his ugly, colorless visage. Both glaring at each other like wolves.

"Well?" groaned Godiva, hollowly.

"I know what I'm going to do."

CHAPTER VIII.

WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN.

A VERTIGO seized Monica!

When that awful sensation was passed, the conspirators were in the act of parting. They were standing exactly upon the spot beside the great boulder, where Monica had been sitting during the interview between Godiva and Geoffrey. At their feet they suddenly beheld a white, filmy thing, fluttering in the light breeze; it was the piece of lace upon which she had been at work.

Suppose they should see it, pick it up, look around for the owner and discover her?

She remained terribly still and composed. If the worst came, she was ready to fight like a tigress for her life, as now she saw the worst must come, if they found her so near their murderous conference.

They did not embrace at parting as they had at meeting; their eyes avoided each other; their hands, mechanically moving toward each other, shrunk back without touching. Already the crime the two had planned was edging between them, so that each

could look on the other only through its loathsome shade.

And with this strange adieu they parted. He walked away into the dusky shadows, leaving her standing as if rooted, her eyes on the ground at a point only a few inches from that fatal bit of lace.

Godiva Montague stood so a long time.

What passed in her mind then?

Can any human being, born with moral perception, receive from helpless infancy up to proud youth's prime the unwearied benefactions of a generous patron, and then meditate his destruction for no more potent reason than the sake of self, without anguish?

Perhaps. But the soul must be long enslaved to the most imbruting of vices, the heart withered to naught, the stake immense, to produce such villainy. Godiva was not so imbruted. Had she not been as carefully hid from vice as any cloistered nun? Ran there not in her veins ancient blood, which had inspired chivalry and fed the hearts of heroes? Where had she seen vice and consorted with cruelty, that she could now face them, all unmasked, without sickening and shrinking!

"Oh, my God!" moaned she, in hoarse tones, "what is this I am letting them push me into? Is this I, Godiva?"

Another long, long pause, her stricken face growing white yet, her lips twitching, pale, and dry. Then she moved her hands as if to wring them, and the action set the stone of a little ring on one of them shimmering, and the shimmer caught her lack-luster eye. She lifted that hand and gazed upon the little ring—a slim, chased band of gold, with one tiny point of diamond fastening it, in the device of a buckle. The gradual change on her face was horrible to see; the change in her voice, when she spoke, horrible to hear. She might have been the awful Geraldine, as she changed from lady bright to loathsome witch, with serpent's eye, in the baron's hall, before the terror-stricken Christmaiden, Christabel!

"Ay, let me remember that! Let me keep that before my mind, and I shall not go back," she muttered. "On my knees!—at his—his feet, Otto Derwent's. My pride in the dust—forced tears flowing—heart writhing with fury and self-disgust—and all my reward his sarcastic laugh and icy command to 'Rise and resume your maidenhood for the sake of the old blood in your base, unworthy heart.' 'You cannot have thought to blind me, Godiva,' he said, heaping upon me humiliation upon humiliation. 'Do you think I have not seen all your strivings to win the title of mistress of Dornoch Weald? That I have not laughed in derision, and writhed in shame, that a woman of my house could so unsex herself? I tell you, on my oath, Godiva, that, of all your foul-souled sex (and I have tried them well), you are the most pitifully despicable and the last I should have married, if I ever married any of you. Now, go and study up hypocrisy; it is your only safeguard in the world of men, who are not all blind, and need that screen between them and your real self, if you would ever capture a husband.' He said this—he, who had lavished so much wealth and kindness upon me, his poor, trembling, friendless kinswoman, that I was really, really willing to be his wife! No, they are not pushing me to anything that I would not rush to do of my own accord. No, no."

She ended her snarling soliloquy with an outburst of passion that shook her from head to foot, and sent a pang as of the doomed to the heart of the listener, whose generous soul had been urging her in the beginning of the soliloquy to reveal herself, on her knees, at the tempted woman's feet, as a suppliant for her father's life.

By these fierce memories, doubly galling, now thus overheard by her, her interference would but haster on the tragedy, beginning with herself.

Godiva had snatched the little ring off her finger long ago, and she now held it up, a fatal smile of revenge carved upon her mouth.

"And so," she resumed laughing, "he put upon my finger the betrothal-ring that was slipped on the patrician's finger a hundred years ago of my ancestress, Godiva Derwent, by the hand who had carried her horses—gave it with the taunt, 'The base gift to the base soul. As long as the 'buckle-ring' shines upon your hand, symbol of the first donor's trade among straps and stables, you will recall the ugly fate of the first Godiva, who crawled back to the degraded home when her stabler abandoned her, and was mercifully slain by her haughty brother, Otho, who thus wiped out the stain with which she had blotted the escutcheon of Derwent. Were it possible, I, too, should thus wipe out the stain of your unwomanliness—you, most of all women, undesired; but as I cannot, live you henceforth and forever unwed, forever despised, at Dornoch-Weald.' A fair reminiscence, truly! And I shall never escape from its haunting memory, nor elude his withering hate, until one of us two lies under this old earth."

She stamped her foot upon the mossy ground; her flashing eyes caught sight of the slow bit of web, fluttering close to her heart. The girl stooped and rose, with Monica's pattern of lace, the needle still stuck in one of the meshes; she slipped the ring back on her finger, and with a whispered exclamation turned the exquisite trifle over and over, her practiced eye taking in all the delicacy and costliness of such workmanship.

"Who has been here? Good Heavens! Who intrudes in these woods but myself?"

She drew herself up, panting and startled, and carefully scrutinized her surroundings, listening with bated breath between each long, keen stare.

But she missed the hollow oak, strangely enough; though Monica understood the marvel better when she afterward saw how narrow the aperture must have looked from Godiva's position, and who, being a good head taller, and proportionately stouter,

than herself, would naturally imagine that nothing human could have squeezed in there.

So, not seeing any one, and hearing nothing, she shrugged her shoulder, replaced her hat upon her glowing hair, and with a look of Satanic determination not good to see upon such lovely young features, she softly took her way down the hill to the Weald, rustling as she went.

Monica went home to the inn, shut herself into her chamber, and gave her soul up to the contemplation of this most terrible revelation.

The position—we know what the position was, as much as she herself did, thanks to the gossip of Dame Hicks and the two assignations of Miss Montacute. One or two points may be placed more clearly, as Monica elucidated them for herself by the course of reasoning.

Why had Godiva summoned her cousin Geoffrey to the Weald, and put him in possession of so much of the brothers Marshalls' doings?

The reason was not far to seek. *She loved him*—in her own fierce self-centered way; a love that was ready to embrace or betray according as it was rewarded. He had plainly shown her, that even though he loved no one else, he did not, and would not, love her.

She had thus given him his chance, and he had thus forfeited it.

She was now bound to the enemy, and Geoffrey might hope for no more of her championship.

Had she not betrayed rather too much of the intentions of her accomplice, for the safety of their schemes? In her urgent endeavors to wring gratitude from Geoffrey, to arouse his watchfulness so as to insure his presence at the Weald, and to retain his respect, had she not disclosed, with perilous distinctness, the conspirators' chosen path?

It seemed like it, and yet, perhaps, she was confident of her ability to oust the nephew, who was in disgrace, from his uncle's roof, the instant he began to meddle with existing arrangements; perhaps she had the secret power to have him turned from the Weald before he had the chance—however impetuous—of warning his uncle of his peril.

From Monica's brief study of Godiva's wily mind, she could not hope that she had ruined her own cause thus; doubtless Geoffrey would either be sent from Dornoch the moment he was discovered there, or his mouth would be closed for the time by some crafty sophistry of the Jezebel's.

The future lay unrolled before her without one obstacle to its success—except what she, Monica, could place in the path.

And now to the task of arranging her plans.

We know why this hot-hearted, high-spirited, American village girl has come to England—to avenge in some always undefined way the injury her father put upon her mother, in deserting her nineteen years ago.

Before she had laid one stone upon another, in the building of her retribution, she had discovered other, and more devilish enemies, already far advanced in the work of destruction, she forced to stand by—the only witness of her father's mortal peril.

She had come for vengeance. If her thirst for this devil's draught is insatiable, she has only to fold her hands, and the cup will be held anon to her lips, brimming over with a vengeance bitterer far than any her woman-heart has dreamed of.

And she finds to-day that her thirst has fled—that one drop of such a cup of vengeance would choke her; her woman-heart has turned traitor to the fell purpose which has driven her across the seas; it only sighs "save! save!" forgetting its first bitter cry, "retribution!"

With the first whisper of wrong to the man, Otto Derwent, who has broken her mother's heart and doomed her to toil and obscurity, a passion of filial care has sprung up—not tenderness—not one gleam of that—only the burning wish to fly to his aid, to save him from the mercenary brood of vipers he is cherishing in his bosom.

She sat down by the little thick-paned, mullioned window in the English inn, trembling, bewildered, moaning and praying for strength and wisdom; she rose calm, resolved, with a plain duty before her. She unlocked the little trunk which held her modest outfit, kindly furnished by good, silly Mrs. Frothingham; along with the precious papers which proved her identity. She took these, placed them in her sachel, her mother's photograph with them, by the Loangerie photographer, in rather a primitive style, yet furnishing a pathetically accurate portrait of that wan, worn face, a few months before death, with the dear familiar figure, from which all the poverty of its cares and the emaciation of a hard life had not been able to rob the natural grace.

She dressed herself carefully in her one black suit, a little soft ruffle of black crepe lisse at the delicate milk-white throat and arched wrists; and her rich jet hair smoothed in satin folds back from temples, upon the polished marble surface of which a tracery of veins as blue and slender as sapphire thread, exquisitely indicated the feminine tenderness and weakness of the young creature's organization.

Then she donned her dainty black cashmere dolman, embroidered richly by her own clever hands with a running vine in black silk, an ornamentation that served to render her simple costume as elegant, and in point of fact, as costly, as that of a Fifth avenue belle; then her hat, a black felt one, with a broad, plush-lined brim, turned up at one side, and heavily plumed (by Mrs. Frothingham's own hands and kind gift) with rich black ostrich feathers; jewelry suitable to her morning attire, she owned none, so she stuck one fringed white winter chrysanthemum with its dark serrated leaf at her throat (a pot or two of blossoming plants stood in her window); and then Monica Derwent was ready to enter her father's house.

For she meant to go boldly thither, demand an in-

interview with Mr. Derwent, and reveal all she had overheard.

She passed out into the public parlor in search of the dame; she wished to tell her where she had gone—in case, by some unforeseen chance, Derwent's enemies might discover the approach of his rescuer, and do her harm.

The grating, guttural voice of the innkeeper's wife proclaimed her presence in the parlor, before Monica entered the door, and she found herself unexpectedly confronting Geoffrey Kilmyre. She could not repress an involuntary start and hesitation as she recognized him, and he, looking up at the graceful figure at the door, gave an unmistakable movement of surprise also, and with raised eyebrows and checked speech, gazed full at her. She, of course, was the first to recover herself; she might have known that he would be sure to come to the "Dornoch Arms" for rest and refreshment, before he ventured to the Weald; she therefore entered with a quiet apology for intruding, and asked the dame to step aside "for one moment."

Geoffrey, who could not account for such an apparition at the obscure and vulgar little inn as readily as she could for his, sauntered to a distant window, but sent more than one furtive glance her way as she spoke in low, well-bred tones to the dame.

"I am going to Dornoch-Weald, Mrs. Hicks," said she; "I hope to get back here in the course of an hour; but if I don't—something may have happened! May—the fact is, I don't feel quite myself, Mrs. Hicks, and if I should happen to get ill on the road I shouldn't like to be left lying helpless there, so—"

"Lordy! What's a-goin' for to happen ye, wench?" cried the dame, with the instant fluster and fuss of her caste. "If ye feels sickish, why don't ye stop i' the house, 'stid o' trapezing 'way off to the Weald?"

"I wish to go, that's enough," said Monica, with unruffled decision; whereat Geoffrey, who was hearing distinctly every syllable uttered by the pair, hers through its penetrating purity of tone, and the dame's through its hard loudness, greatly marveled, saying to himself:

"No Englishwoman are you! Not a girl in the realm, bred as our girls are, could carry herself with such dignified self-reliance, and you're scarcely more than a child yet!"

"But, Lawk! What a plague can ye want at Master's, that ye canna wait until ye're well, to go? Ye're phiz looks that queerish too, jest as white as my smock—"

"Madam, I must go!" interposed Monica, haughtily, then, glancing at the tall clock which stood like a moon-faced specter in a shadowy corner: "It is now two o'clock; if I am not back at three, send one of your men for me."

Mrs. Hicks stood dumb-struck at the awful stateliness of the "furrin wench's" address ("Madam to her, save the mark! For all as if she were My Lady!") and ventured not another remonstrance; but Geoffrey could restrain his astonishment and curiosity no longer, and arrested the young lady's retreat by wheeling upon her with a courtly bend of the head, and motion of the hand.

"Madam, I too am going to the Weald," he said, hastily joining her; "if you feel at all in need of assistance, much or little," he added, with a frank smile, "I am entirely at your service. And our friend Mrs. Hicks here, can attest to my respectability. Come, wake, Mrs. Hicks, and introduce me to your boarder."

His air, so open-hearted, so bright and sprightly, without a shade of anything either forward or supercilious in it, went straight to Monica's heart, already inclined toward him during the revelations of his nature in the forest; and as the good woman pronounced their names in her own rough dialect, her fine eyes rested upon his with a singularly beaming, gentle expression, fascinating enough to him, who held no key to that significant look.

"I thank you for your offer," she said, blushing faintly as he grasped her hand in English fashion and shook it heartily; "and I accept it."

CHAPTER IX.

ENTERING THE PORTALS.

As the two walked side by side through the village street, gaped at by every rustic eye that could rush in time to window or door—the rich man's unknown daughter and the rich man's disinherited nephew—she was musing:

"Why should I not confide all to Geoffrey Kilmyre?"

And he was musing:

"And this is an American lady! This is the typical Independent Female! A fairer, sweeter result never flowed from republicanism, than this pure, brave vestal—this princess in her own right!"

"And yet, I may be fatally wrong in doing so," Monica's thought went on—"how do I know what mental qualities this man may possess? Shall I not be too impulsive, rashly impetuous, in throwing wide this fatal matter to him? And if I speak at all, how much shall I reveal? Anything about myself?"

"What can her station be?" Geoffrey's thoughts proceeded. "I believe that in their land all women dress in a costly way, indeed that the cook can copy her mistress's fashions if she chooses; no, I need not try to judge by her dress; but her face—in what social niche is such a page as this to be placed? What shining innocence—radiant goodness—refinement—poetry—a face for Zimmermann to expend his choicest praises upon!"

"Let me not ruin all by recklessness," continued she; "let me study him calmly and closely first—has he not led a sad wild life—and how am I to know what may be the distorting influence of such a life on his character? Caution, caution! No, I shall keep my own counsel. Besides, I must beware of entering that house in such unpopular company, if I would not be treated as an ally of his. Indeed, I am very rash to speak with him at all in public;

suppose any of the conspirators should see us in conference? Suppose Mr. Derwent should meet us?"

"What quiet force is in her beautiful eye!" continued Geoffrey, going on with his reverie quite as absorbedly as she with hers; "what proud command in her straightly-leveled gaze, her beautiful closely-fitting lips, and the poise of the head, with the face slightly lifted toward the heavens! Why this is a very noble woman, surely! And for all her stateliness and power she cannot be more than seventeen!"

Monica was not quite nineteen, and the extreme fragility of her appearance, together with the American characteristics of *piccola* figure, fairy hands and feet, and unaffected manners, always gave her a more youthful look than of right belonged to her.

As her companion came to the last conclusion she turned her calm eyes upon him.

"Sir," said she, "pardon my apparent fickleness of purpose in changing my mind about accepting your escort to Dornoch-Weald. I have a better reason, I find upon consideration, for declining your courtesy than for accepting it."

"How wise—how perfectly lady-like, and how prettily expressed!" thought Geoffrey, with a little irrational sting of disappointment! "The loss is mine," he said gallantly, "I was in hopes that I should have the pleasure of a talk about the United States, which I have never visited."

"I have not lived in Mrs. Peter Hicks's society for three weeks without learning who Mr. Geoffrey Kilmyre is," she observed quietly, "and probably, not only a great deal of truth about you, but a great deal of rustic fiction too. I am in a humble station, sir, and cannot with propriety appear at the Weald in your company."

He made an impatient gesture. Something in the admission filled him for the moment with a sudden rage, as irrational as the former disappointment.

"Pshaw! Please don't punish the 'hated aristocracy' in my person, Mademoiselle American; do assure you I am untainted by that insular virus. You are a lady in manner and education; I feel honored to be permitted to walk with you."

"I thank you, and believe you," said Monica, sweetly grave, at which he could have kissed her, "but all the same, for my own sake, I must bid you leave me."

He looked imploringly at her.

"May I be presumptuous and ask what position you are anxious to secure at the Weald?" he ventured, with some modest hesitation, which sat very gracefully upon the handsome fellow.

She started, for the moment looking strangely at him, under the impression that there was a mine of significance under his question; then she recollected herself, he meant to ask whether she was applying for service at the great house. She could not restrain from a faint smile, so curiously compounded of a mischievous national inclination to put herself down at the lowest round of the ladder, and a somber pride at the realization of who she was, and what right she had to mount the highest; then she replied very civilly, "I had no thought of asking for any position there, sir; but if I could secure one it would be indeed a great boon to me; a mighty boon, oh, yes, if I only could!" she exclaimed, getting suddenly agitated as she perceived a faint chance of assistance from this unexpected ally. Surely he had not lived all the years of his boyhood among these old family servants without winning enough influence over them to help her a little now!

"I am a very poor girl," she said, her clear, delicate tones ringing fearlessly out the admission, in singular contrast to its humility; "I am a stranger in this country, absolutely friendless, and I am obliged to live in Dornoch for a time, and during that time I can't afford to be idle."

"Stay; I think I can help you here, Miss Rivers," interrupted Geoffrey, eagerly. "I am in black enough disgrace with the head of the house, as you have doubtless heard, *ad nauseam*; but I may say that Geoffrey Kilmyre wields more power over the subordinates than their master does. I can count on getting you a situation, I know, from good old Mrs. Aberfeld, the housekeeper, the apple of whose grim, gray eye I have ever been. She's Scotch; the widow of a wonderful naturalist, whose name appears among the savans of the realm with honor, though he was only a gardener in the Duke of Carnegie's employ. For twenty years has Elspeth Aberfeld reigned as queen of the domestic force in Dornoch Weald. If she elects to receive you, your future is provided for; for she is firmly rooted as the Bass Rock, and unchanging as the sun."

"Thank you, thank you," murmured Monica, gratefully. It was all she could say, but her heart was full.

She could have knelt down on the road and thanked God for opening this despaired-of door. No wonder her *spirituelle* face shone so with intelligence and emotion that the young patrician gazed quite dazzled, with a fierce rebellion rising up in his soul against England's cruel conservatism, which would blasphemously aver that he stooped to admire a girl in this one's position.

"If she were a beggar," mused the well-born and handsome man, for whom many a titled lady fair had sighed, "she would honor me by giving me that dainty hand. Not a peeress of them all can equal her in grace and wisdom."

For one singularity of Geoffrey's attraction toward Monica was that she had no particular beauty to dazzle him—no voluptuousness of physique or soul to appeal to the senses. Hers was an enchantment that flowed from the noblest in woman, and awoke what was noblest in man; her spell was innocence, clothed with intellect.

By this time they had got out of the village, and were walking along the winding road, which led through deep, dark groves, over grass-sown pla-

teaux, and through brown stretches of plowed land, to the Weald.

"Since you are so kind as to offer your help," said Monica, halting suddenly under a clump of glossy live oaks, "I shall ask you to precede me, talk to the housekeeper on my behalf, and then come here and notify me of her answer."

After a few more pleasant words, they parted, with this understanding; and seating herself out of sight of the road, Monica patiently awaited his return.

He did not follow the public track, but as soon as he had entered the limits of the Derwent grounds chose lonely and unfrequented paths, by which precaution he succeeded in reaching the house without encountering any of his uncle's guests.

Monica, well concealed among the furze, saw a brilliant cavalcade of mounted ladies and gentlemen cantering past her, conspicuous among them the master himself, with his pair of satellites, the Marshall brothers; and well she read the sinister pallor of Rufus, who rode, Judas-like in his fawning affection and docility, at Derwent's right hand, while Gavaine, the bully, a heavily-built man of twenty-six, with high cheek-bones, coarse, ruddy complexion, bristling, sandy mustache, and small bullet head, rode, resplendent in a foppish equestrian costume, as close at Derwent's left hand.

And for once the traitress herself was there, Godiva Montacute, riding a milk-white nonpareil in horse-flesh—a baronet on one side and a viscount on the other, both gazing admiringly upon her proud lily face, the red rust of her lustrous plaits, and her undulating *svette* figure in its habit of Lincoln green.

In half an hour Geoffrey Kilmyre was back at Monica's side.

"It's all arranged, Miss Rivers; I told Aberfeld all I knew about you. She had already heard no end of gossip about the 'beautiful foreigner' at the inn, and you are to walk straight into the pleasant situation of assistant housekeeper."

With her eyes on the ground she heard his joyous announcement; her thoughts had left a peculiar significance and ambiguity of expression hovering upon her. It seemed to Geoffrey that a brilliant burst of sunshine dazzled him as she lifted those solemn orbs to his, and that an electrical current thrilled from her hand to his as she clasped it, saying proudly:

"You have befriended an unknown woman, as a knight of Arthur's table would have done. The time may be when your reward will come—in proportion to the goodness of this act."

And then he saw her walking down the road to the Weald, her black, shining robes waving around her delicate figure, and her beautiful head up like a princess.

"In disguise—surely in disguise," muttered Geoffrey, staring spell-bound.

Monica Derwent approached the home of her father—the home which should have been her mother's.

She passed through the "Home Park"—a spacious inclosure of softest sward, level as a lake somewhere, and rolling in delicious curves otherwheres; clumps of magnificent old oaks studded the emerald expanse, and herds of lovely little red deer skurried across the open and vanished in the distant copses; a high stone wall, richly clothed in honeysuckle and ivy, ran completely around this outer environ; then came the lodge, a picturesque cottage of weather-stained stone, beside a pair of huge iron gates of fantastic open scroll-work, set in a massive socket of white stone, with tall, fluted pillars and a mighty arch, the latter surmounted by a shield and supporters, and the Derwent bearings, with their legend in tarnished gold letters:

"DARE NOT DERWENT."

Passing through the side gate, Monica walked up the mile-long avenue, which wound gracefully between somber files of trees, through the hoary trunks of which came glimpses of garden plats, and sweeps of budding shrubberies; new and again came the glister of crystal domes, and the plummy silver sprays of playing fountains; sometimes a section of carved terrace balustrades, or the velvet moss bank of some tangle-nook, where nature had been left to work in all her unrestrained fantasy; and at last came the widening out of the avenue where the old tree-trunks receded in a wide semicircle, like cathedral pillars, and the full width of the mansion blocked the way and closed the vista nobly.

It was a fine ancient house, built of white Caen stone, and presenting, with its keep and Martello towers, more the appearance of a fortalice, or fortified castle, than that of a private dwelling. It covered an immense area spreading out in a hollow square, with a court inside, open to the sky, and reached through an imposing archway in the rear. The front was exceedingly distinguished, with its rich and florid carving, its clustering pillars, palatial portal; its charming rose-window blazing like a sun over the door; its rows of tall Gothic windows, some of them restored in single sheets of glass, some left in all the glory of their massive iron styles, tiny mullioned panes, and stained glass bordering; its balustraded summit, and the crumbling turrets of the two round towers. The whole pile was richly mantled in robes of century-old ivy; and, supported by deep embowering trees which leaned their topmost branches over the back of the roof, touching the great chimneys and rustling among the circling clouds of swallows.

A narrow girth of black earth ran round the base of the house, and in this earth flowers of radiant hues and spicy perfume grew; here and there a mighty stone flower-stand, or porphyry *jardiniere* lifted its graceful shape; the broad shallow front steps of gleaming white marble, were supported on either side by couching figures in stone of the tyr-

cal monsters of the Derwent arms, and the richly-carved frieze above the grand portal bore the armorial crest in red gold, which gleamed copper-colored in the sun.

This was the home of Otto Derwent; here had he been living in peace, all unremorseful, while his wife was dying in the cold, starved, wooden cottage in Loangerie.

"Oh, just God! Art Thou avenging her?" muttered the unknown daughter of these strangely sundered parents, as her flashing eyes swept over all this splendor, and her hot heart grew big and bitter.

However, this was, of all times, the least reasonable, in which to nurse feelings of revenge against Mr. Derwent; she had come there to watch over, and guard him from his foes; should she carry into the gracious mission a heart bitterer than theirs?

She resolutely closed all her senses against the impressions which surrounded her. She saw, set deep-socketed in the stone curtain between one of the towers and the main building, a little iron-studded wicket; it stood open, and she passed through.

The hoarse baying of dogs assailed her; two large kennels occupied the little triangular grassy yard she had entered; two mastiffs sprung the length of their chains at her, then stood, sniffing with their black flexible noses at her, and lay down again, as if satisfied.

A wide glass door swung open at her elbow, and a tall, portly, exceedingly dignified old lady stood in the aperture. Her face was very fair, clearly rosy all over, and criss-crossed by innumerable fine lines; her eyes were of the palest hue of stocking-gray, set high in her face, and almost blank in their utter expressionlessness; she wore a cap of snowy lisse, which almost concealed the thin locks of sandy hair, streaked with gray, that lay sparsely on each sunken temple, broad vapory streamers floating majestically down her back; her dress was of the stiffest dead-black silk, and on her white, plump, wrinkled hand shone a superb amethyst ring, the stone of the size of a broad bean.

"Good-mornin' ta ye, nae doot ye're the lassie Maister Geoffrey was ta send me," said she in deliberate broad Scotch, and with the pompous air of some high dignitary.

"You are Mrs. Aberfeld? Yes, madam, you have guessed correctly, I am Monica Rivers; what can you give me to do for a living?" said Monica.

"Hech! That's about as wise-like a beginnin' as I've ever heard o'," exclaimed the housekeeper in gracious approbation, as she beckoned the stranger into the house. "For a bit girlie like you, ye hae a maist wunnerfu' comman' o' yersel' an' yer tongue; an' that, I take it, is about the best sign I ken o', that ye're the recht sort to succeed in this warl'. Come awa', lassie; I bid ye welcome wi' a' my heart."

And glowing under this auspicious greeting, and murmuring to her fluttering heart:

"A good omen—a good omen!" Monica Derwent entered the portals.

CHAPTER X.

FOR FATHER'S SAKE.

THIS was how the daughter gained entrance to her father's home.

Assistant housekeeper!

Mrs. Aberfeld was no Mrs. Frothingham, to accept the pretty stranger on the strength of her face. She asked for her past history.

"My parents were school-teachers," said Monica, truthfully, but she was talking of her grandparents. "I lost my father nineteen years ago, and my mother died a few months since. I was teaching the district school until she died."

Mrs. Aberfeld asked for references.

"I have a letter from the rector of the church of which I was a member," said Monica, presenting a most kind and fatherly one given her cheerfully the evening of her departure from Loangerie.

Mrs. Aberfeld asked her intentions in coming thus alone and friendless to a strange country.

"I had nothing left to live for, there, and thought I might gird myself up anew for the rest of my hard life, by taking a change," explained Monica.

Mrs. Aberfeld was satisfied.

"And now, what can you do?" she demanded.

Monica exhibited her skill in account-keeping. The old lady's eyes glistened; accounts were her torment. Monica enumerated her capabilities for linen-keeping, plate-cleaning, drawing-room attendance; the housekeeper thought of the long, long flights of velvet-covered stairs, and inwardly thanked Providence. Monica brought out a piece of lace.

"Gracious! Why, lassie, ye've got a fortune at your finger-ends! The leddies 'll gie ye a guinea a yard for that, as sure's deeth, woman!" cried the Scotchwoman, in raptures.

Monica was accepted and installed in her office, instantaneously.

She mentioned her little box at the inn; a man was sent in the servants' spring cart for it, and with him went Monica's last pound to pay her board to Dame Hicks.

She was taken to view her bedroom.

It was on the inner side of the house, its one narrow mullioned window overlooking the inclosed court, two stories from the ground. Had the sun not been streaming into the deep, well-like place, and lighting into a sheaf of silver the mighty fountain that flung high its plummy jets in the center of the green patch, and flashing like a ring of crystal from the sky-lights of the picture-gallery, which girdled round the court the story beneath, Monica would have found something weird and lonely in her outlook, especially as she had been conducted through about a quarter of a mile of ancient corridor, and quite away from the modern and inhabited part of the mansion, to get there.

"The maister's sic' a fidget about new faces," explained Mrs. Aberfeld, "we dinna lat him see oor fresh han's, 'till they've been here awhile; then he lats them be, after we can say they're weel tried. Keep oot o' his way, bonnie lassie; he'll notice your face as sure's he sees it; an' there's a hantle wild eneuch young chaps here that wadna think twice o' leavin' a' their grand dames for a sicht o' you. But I can see that ye're a dounce an' modest bairn, an' want nae man's light loves."

The room was, with the exception of being kept sparkingly fresh and clean, exactly as it had been a hundred years ago; not a stick of the antique furniture had been removed, nor even the arras torn down. Monica was deeply read; she looked about her with sparkling eyes. Here was food for her romantic fancy, should she see or hear no human soul for months.

"I am fortunate," she said, heartily; "I ought to be of some use here, since I am so kindly treated."

Mrs. Aberfeld listened to this becoming sentiment with keen appreciation.

"Ye're a good bairn, an' a weel favored ane, tae. I'll see that ye hae a' your rights among thae fleer-in' stranger hussies," she said, with Celtic defiance. She was evidently recalling some skirmish she may have got the worst of, with the many strange maids who had come with their mistresses to the Weald.

"And now, please show me all over the house," said Monica, addressing herself with her usual prompt decision to her work; "and whenever you are weary, send somebody else to finish. I need not fatigue you unnecessarily."

And this consideration was so very grateful to the stiff old bones of the stately housekeeper, whose principal foible it was to affect an inexhaustible young frame, that she redoubled her good opinion of her new assistant, and handed her over to Dodge, the head "groom of the chambers," with a special recommendation to take care of her, and show her everywhere.

So then beheld the unsuspected daughter gliding after the tall fine-figured functionary in Lincoln-green livery, with the Dornoch crest on his gait buttons, his thumbs stuck proudly into his arm-holes, and his little bedazzled eyes blinking furtively at her.

Through majestic passages, wide as an ordinary dining-room; into grand halls, wonderful pictures of mediæval days; peeps into significant looking little ante-chambers, with sudden secret doors behind arras of tapestry; stairs built in the ten-feet of unsuspected thickness of the walls; in and out of crooked, shadowy corridors; up, up winding flights of stairs, black as jet, and slippery as ice; in at a velvet-colored pair of folding doors, to traverse the ever curving picture-gallery, which ran clear round the inner court, with skylights all the way, and out at another similar door, just across the court, thus reaching the exact opposite side of the mansion.

"And this here door, miss," explained the footman with his best air, "that we always keeps locked (because of the family ghost, miss, he! he!), this here door leads into the old half, which I'd be showing you too, miss, only that it ain't never used, and consequently ain't worth troublin' you with."

So instead of turning into the ruined portion, they left the low-browed oak door behind them, and continued on up-stairs.

But Monica had seen something in the picture gallery which had paled her cheek, and filled her mind with thoughts.

"Escape detection here—never!" she was assuring herself with sinking heart, as she left behind her the portrait of a certain beauty of Derwent blood, who was startlingly like herself, and might have sat for her easily; "ah, well, I take it as a sign that I must hasten, this very night—if I can, I must warn him!"

She went back to the housekeeper's room, and spent the afternoon with her lace in her hands, and Mrs. Aberfeld's pompous voice sounding in uninterrupted volubility, as she gave a stately autobiography of her past life. Such a listener was perfectly fascinating to the good lady, not one question, nor yawn, nor fidget of boredom.

"I couldna hae dune better than tak' the lassie, an' weel young maister seems to hae kenned it!" she chuckled.

The cavalcade was heard returning, and the firm, almost martial tread of the Master of Dornoch, passing on his way to his dressing-room.

"An' thae Marshalls at his heels as usual," sneered Mrs. Aberfeld. "It's my belief they tak' turns to watch be him, ilka nicht."

Monica had marked the significant juxtaposition of these brothers to her father; their dressing-rooms, among the handsomest in the house, were next door to his; their suit of parlors opened into his; and not only this, but this group seemed to be in a measure separated from the rest of the guests by a short corridor, which led from the main house through an arch.

Dinner passed, with sounds of hilarity floating from the dining-room after the ladies had sailed in a long and shining train into the drawing-room; presently the strains of an orchestra came from the music-room, and an extemporized ball closed the evening.

Long before ten o'clock Mrs. Aberfeld was saying, in her motherly way:

"Ye'll be wearied, my bairn; awa wi' ye till yere bed; 'early tae bed,' ye ken?"

And Monica had dutifully retired to her little room, where, with the lamp turned low and her face pressed to the window-panes, she had watched the reflections from the ball-room, as they were flung through open casements onto the opposite wall; and listening to the long-drawn clangor of the brass and the vibrating twanging of the stringed instruments.

And at midnight the lights went out, the shadows

vanished, the music was mute; not a sound stirred in all the mighty mansion.

Now was her time to see the master alone; risking all on the one throw, Monica went forth.

She expected to find the Marshall brothers in her way; to be received at first with insulting amazement and incredulity; but she hoped that with the truth written in her face, and by dint of her fiery sincerity and urgency, she would overcome them, they not yet suspecting her advent upon their stage.

Straight through the wide lonely halls she went, chilled, this raw spring night to the bone, by the vault-like breath, and startled in spite of herself by the mysterious noises that echoed through the unfamiliar regions, which were dimly lit at intervals by old-fashioned lamps with moon-like sconces. At last she approached the suit occupied by her father.

As she had expected, voices warned her that he was not alone; she came in sight of his parlor door; it was flung open to admit the warmth from a modern register-grating in the hall just outside, and as she paused in the sheltering shadow of a bronze Roman Youth that stood on a green porphyry pedestal at the angle between the two meeting passages, she saw the interior of the room.

Her father was reclining in an elegant attitude of ease and comfort in a huge chair of ancient needlework, a dressing-robe of steel-colored silk, lined with delicate lavender and flung open at his firm white throat, imbued him with something of the air of royalty on the throne. He held a cigar of choice brand in his graceful fingers; and with his proud head thrown back, and his dark, sparkling eyes smiling into vacancy, he was listening to the words of wisdom which flowed from the mouth of Gavaine Marshall.

Both brothers were present. Gavaine strolling round the beautiful stately chamber, big and hulking, like some vulgar horse-jockey; and Rufus, very peaked and pallid, with an uneasy down look in his white-lashed eyes, seated in another chair of the same shape as his host's, and doing his poor best to emulate the grace and ease of his attitude.

"Tell ye what, if it was me," Mr. Gavaine was observing, loudly—"if it was me I'd set the dawgs on him whenever he come nigh hand the place—dash him."

"I dare say you would, my brave Gavaine," returned the Master of Dornoch-Weald, slowly and gently, but with a small thread of biting derision running through the quiet tones—(to Monica's utter surprise, for Dame Hicks had told her that Mr. Derwent was infatuated by these men)—"but your ways are not all my ways. Had you been placed in circumstances similar to mine, it would not have been the next-of-kin to the Master of Dornoch, with the old Derwent blood in him, that your 'dawg' (a mongrel, of course) would bite, but a person plebeian like yourself. *Noblesse oblige!* Gentlemen use gentlemen's weapons, sirs!"

Then Geoffrey's arrival was known. Had he attempted to speak to his uncle yet?

"Whatever he has come here for," said Rufus, putting in his oar with an impatient glare at his vulgar brother, "it can bring nothing but distress to you, honored sir. It is a difficult thing for me to say—only my confidence in your knowledge of my nature, sir, could induce me to venture so far—but I must implore you not to grant Geoffrey Kilmyre an interview."

Ha! With these wretches at both his ears, what chance was there for friends to whisper one word of warning?

"It is well for you that I do know what you are," said Mr. Derwent, turning his brilliant eyes a moment on the craven visage of his distant relative. "If I were suspicious of you, how extremely ugly it would look for you to warn me against letting my nephew, disinherited for your sake, see me, when it might be just possible that he had come to confess his errors and seek reconciliation."

"If he only had," sighed Rufus, withstanding the obvious irony of Derwent's speech, with miraculous density; "but alas! no such good news. He has come for more money."

"Ah! And how came that item to your knowledge?" asked Mr. Derwent, slightly stirring his easy position; and Monica thought she saw one delicate hand clutch at his side for a moment, but the next it was idly toying with his lavender silk tassel.

"I'd rather you wouldn't ask me," said Rufus, with affected reluctance; "I hate to carry tales of that man. Still, I will speak. Am I to be coward enough to see my dear benefactor cheated of his love, cozened of his money, and derided afterward by a heartless profligate? Not for all the wealth in England. I happen to be in a position to know all that Mr. Geoffrey Kilmyre does, and have been so for the past six months. By pure accident I discovered that my valet, Joe, had a brother Jack who is valet to Kilmyre. Jack sees his master living at the fashionable pace, tells Joe, and Joe tells his master. So it is that murder will out."

Mr. Derwent had troubled himself to sit upright during this explanation, and to fix upon the speaker those fire-ringed eyes, whose strange and vivid gaze had dragged Monica out of her sleep the first time they had rested upon her. Under that gaze Rufus Marshall writhed and paled, but stubbornly kept his sneaking glance averted and maintained his point.

"Do you know what I should do with such a valet as your Joe?" said the Master of the Weald, in a low tone.

"No. What? There's one thing I have done already; I've doubled his wages in reward for his vigilance."

"I should kick him out of my employ," said Mr. Derwent, as gently as ever, "and hire a navy to horsewhip the vile life out of him."

Rufus and his brother stole a cowed look toward each other. They were so very far from being gen-

tiemen that the habits of thought and feeling of those who were continually came upon them unexpectedly as a moon at mid-day.

"Oh, would you?" was all the craven could stammer, fumbling his hands in his pockets in an agony of discomfiture; "still, don't you know, we'd never have known what Kilmyre was up to if it was not for poor Joe?"

"Spare me the foul theme," interrupted Mr. Derwent, with a gesture of disgust.

"How he throws his Cornlea income," persisted Rufus, doggedly, "among all the ballet-girls and variety actresses he can get to go to Thames water parties with him, with champagne of the costliest brands to be had for money, and peaches at a guinea apiece."

"Very good, my young friends," again interposed the master, contemptuously; "I do not exact the filthy service of tale-bearer from you. I prefer to guess at my precious nephew's amusements to having them detailed, however eloquently."

"I was only wishing to explain," proceeded Rufus, obstinately bent on forcing the uncle to hear some damning folly of his nephew, "that *that's* where his own handsome income has gone, so now that he has run himself into a corner by the purchase of the late Duke of Maltraver's toy villa for that unnatural beast, the prize-fighter's sister, 'Bess Bounce,' he, of course, has no option but to come back here—"

"Will you be good enough to hold your peace?" cried Derwent, in sudden fury, starting up from his chair and towering over the cowering dastard as if he would have hurled him under his feet and ground his carcass into dust. "Do I need *your* crafty disclosures to keep in my memory the degradation of my house and name through the mad profligacy of this foolish lad? Dare not to take his name upon your lips again, or, I swear it, I shall drive you from me, never to benefit by the wealth you crouch so low for, by so much as one shilling. Now, sirs, you both at last know my mind." And he walked to a distant window, and dashing aside the silken curtain, sent his blazing eyes in a wide, unseeing sweep over the noble scene, where the timber of three centuries still studied the meads that his fathers had won by deeds of high renown.

In her dark niche, his daughter smiled; the noble wrath of the patrician went with every proud pulse-beat of her body, and then she thrilled to note how her father's spirit had been born again in her: then sighed in bitter anger that, for all his spirit was lofty in some things, it was so base and cowardly in the long-forgotten matter of his village wife.

CHAPTER XI.

A PROUD MAN'S SCORN, AND A FATAL CONSPIRACY.

It was the suppressed voice of Derwent that broke the silence.

"Good night, my kinsmen," he said, without turning toward the pair, who were hunking together awkwardly enough. "I shall not detain you longer; it is late. Good-night."

They glanced uneasily at each other, Gavaine arching his red eyebrows for orders, and Rufus shrugging his lean shoulder with an evil grimace; then they muttered their adieux and retired through a door in the parlor.

Derwent waited until the sound of their steps had ceased, then went to the door which they had left unfastened, shut it smartly, and was starting to shut the door upon the corridor, when Monica stood before him on the threshold.

So pale she seemed, with her small black head and gleaming black eyes, muffled up to the chin in sable garments, too, and her little slim hands clasped imploringly, that he did not in the least recognize her at first, but stood apparently dumb smitten, an expression of utter astonishment upon his haughty visage.

She took advantage of his surprise to step into the room, shut the door, and run up to him.

"Forgive me for coming here—but—let me speak to you," she gasped.

He knew her now; his amazement passed, and a sarcastic disdain curled his delicate lip.

"By what grotesque freak has nature given the features of a Derwent to an American villager?" said he, with a low laugh of scorn. "Twice have you startled me by a resemblance which is utterly unaccountable. But I think I perceive the use you wish to make of it. Ha! ha! ha! trust a *Rivers* to make the most of accident!"

His manner was intolerable to the proud girl in whose veins ran his own haughty blood. What he meant was incomprehensible, but she understood that he was heaping contempt and insult upon her, and for the moment her purpose in seeking him was obscured by the vehement resentment he stirred up in her.

"What do you know about the *Rivers*?" she demanded, in her high, clear, ringing voice, like silver bells, and her magnificent eyes glittering.

"Quite enough," retorted the Master of Dornoch, "to avoid *fortune-hunters*."

"What do you mean?" she cried, wildly; "who wants your fortune?"

His manner changed; the scathing jeer on his lips faded; a spasm—a sort of white scorn and anguish convulsed his paling face; he laid his strong, firm hand upon her shoulder, and with one twist turned her to the full blaze of the large astral lamp which stood on a curiously carved Pompeian table, with its three leopard legs in gleaming black marble, and dead-gold scroll-work round the rim. She met his fierce, inquisitorial gaze eye to eye, all the pride and wrath in her nature uppermost.

As if satisfied, he pushed her from him, turning with a smothered oath from the small, white, venge-

ful face, that could look sweet and tender as a beautiful angel's had he but possessed the key to her heart.

"Girl," said the Master of Dornoch, frigidly, "go back to Addiscombe as fast as steam and machinery can carry you, and say to the idiots who sent you here, *Otto Derwent is not to be swindled out of one pound. He is ready armed against all your arts, and has been any time during these nineteen years. Now, go!*"

He waved her toward the door.

Monica's cheeks flamed, her eyes gushed full; he had torn her very heart.

"You were never so mistaken in—"

"Go!" reiterated he, in a terrible voice.

She started; such a tone had never fallen on her ears before. She looked up at him in her incredulous, feminine way, and the unearthly glare of his eyes struck horror to her soul.

She put up her clasped hands, wailing:

"Oh, sir, let me speak—let me warn—indeed, I am not here on my own behalf—"

"Will you beard me thus, miserable adventuress?" cried he, furiously advancing upon her.

She eluded his grasp by falling on her trembling knees to him.

"Hear me—hear me—I have come to save you!" she cried, in passionate entreaty; but his cruel hands were on her; he dragged her to the door, and flung her violently from him into the dark passage. He never heeded her quick, urgent words, she pouring out as much of her meaning as she could render coherent, poor little soul, with the sobs and tremors of outraged feeling, ay, and of physical fear, too, almost suffocating her.

"I know not who has dared to give you entrance here," spoke the bitter voice of the master, as he closed the door; "but I warn you that if I find you under my roof to-morrow, I shall thrust you out publicly, and dismiss your foolish dupe as well. It is late; I permit you to stay here until daylight; but then you must be gone."

He closed and locked his parlor door, and the young girl crept to the mat outside, and knelt down quivering and gasping, and prayed God to give her patience, and wisdom, and strength to rescue her cruel father.

And long after the last sound had died in the echoing corridors, the devoted daughter still cowered there, listening for the muffled tread of assassins in her father's room.

How bitterly she upbraided herself for the fatal susceptibility to insult, by means of which she had spoiled her opportunity. What demon was it, she passionately asked herself, that had possessed her to resent his suspicions, instead of using every moment of her chance to call his attention to his own peril? Why had she not said, the instant he saw her on the threshold, "*Think of nothing except what I am here to warn you of. I have overheard a conspiracy against your life,*" and so on, would he not have been startled into hearing all she needed to say?

Well, well, she had failed in her first trial, but she should not be beaten out of the field for all that.

"He threatened to thrust me out before all his guests," she thought, quivering even now with the shame and resentment roused by his harshness; "I must gain his ear before the guests rise in the morning. Oh, how can I make him listen to me?"

All the long, cold night she cowered there; then, when the dawn was stealing through the wide stained window at her side, she crept away to her own little room, bathed her burning head in cold water, re-arranged her poor little black silk dress that she had taken such care with the preceding night, and crept back to his door.

Poor child! With what different intentions she had pictured herself lying in wait for the man who slept within.

How little she had known her own sweet, loving heart when she set herself the *role* of Nemesis.

The sounds of early morning began to awake in the castle; the domestic force issuing from their rooms to their daily duties; doors banging, windows thrown wide for the crisp spring breezes, the baying of hungry hounds from the kennels, the loud, triumphant crowing of a vainglorious cock in the henery, the mewing squall of a pair of peacocks strutting on the terrace wall, shrill voices in uncouth remonstrance or laughter, steps hurrying everywhere—all the bruit of castle life awaking, and all filtering in a confused jangle to the ears of the solitary watcher through the jealously closed doors which separated the Master of Dornoch and his two favorite guests from the rest of the household.

But no sound came from within; the three slept on quietly, as if murder had never been committed on earth.

Monica waited until a distant clock rung out the hour of five, by which time the stained window was shedding its full prism of blended colors over her spectral face and weary form; then she gently—oh, so gently—tapped at her father's door.

Instantly some one moved within, a door was flung open, and steps crossed the parlor and stopped close to the door upon the outside of which she was kneeling.

She tapped again.

The door opened, her father's face looked out; seeing her, it gave forth that white flash-like lightning which she had learned to dread with quailing spirit.

Before she could utter aloud what she had already enunciated twice voicelessly, he had shut the door again, and she heard him striding across the room again, and then the long shrill clangor of a bell furiously rung.

He was summoning his servants to cast her out as an adventuress—he would not hear one syllable from her.

"Father!" she shrieked in her anguish.

No reply.

She tottered to her feet, and moaning and weeping, fled from the private corridor to her own room.

As she went she heard the arrival of the master's valet, and the stern, freezing accents of the master's voice; and she hid herself behind the towering walnut armoire that stood in a corner of her bedroom, praying God to keep her hid, so that they should not force her away until she had saved him.

And after she had trembled and wept there for many hours, as it seemed to her, some one did tap at her door, and receiving no answer, came in; and she heard a man's step strutting heavily about, and a man's voice calling imperiously:

"Any one here? Come out, if there be or else you'll be prosecuted for a thief!"

She breathed not till the man had gone, locking the door after him; but then she burst into such a paroxysm of cries and tears (having been wound up to a perilous pitch of excitement for over seven hours), that any one within sound of her voice must have thought they heard the ravings of a maniac; but no one heard, and she screamed herself exhausted, and then lay down on her bed, smiling weakly at herself for a poor silly helpless baby, who was not to be permitted to save her unsuspecting father's life, because God was angry with her for coming to England with the wicked purpose of revenge.

Then she fell, in spite of herself, into a horrid depth of sleep; during which she thought she was dead and dreamed those terrible things that can never afterward be expressed in any language, and it was dim dusk when she rose to her elbow and looked about her; and she was faint with hunger.

At first she did not know that a sound had awakened her, thinking she had slept herself out; but before she had fully collected her thoughts, a voice at her very ear shocked her almost into a swoon.

It was Rufus Marshall speaking; she recognized the voice instantly.

How long that sneaking voice had been muttering she knew not. The first words she caught seemed to be the tail end of a lengthy harangue.

"Don't be a fool," were the gracious words she first heard. "They would never be closeted so long together unless an infernal reconciliation was going on. He has defied us, in seeing the fellow at all. You remember how tetchy he was last night about it. Oh, the devil! everything's going wrong."

"Serves ye right, for a mealy-mouthed muff," growled the husky voice of the bully, Gavaine. "If ye'd let me end it whenever the will was made, we'd have been all too aloof by this time." And he evinced his emotion by a volley of curses, of a vulgarity and blasphemy that would have given Monica the jaundice had she comprehended half of them, which she fortunately did not.

So Geoffrey was closeted with his uncle! In spite of all their arts and falsehoods, Mr. Derwent had chosen to please himself!

Monica's heart beat high with hope; if Geoffrey was forgiven, her father was safe, and Godiva had simply cut the ground from under the conspirators' feet by that little by-play in the forest with Geoffrey.

A hand placed on the old-fashioned latch of which she had supposed to be a closet door in her room, suddenly froze her blood with horror. Were they coming in here?

"Where are ye going, ye booby?" snapped Rufus testily; "can't ye wait like a sensible being till Godiva comes? Anyhow, that ain't the door we come in by, *that's* it."

"Oh, shut up yer mouth!" growled the bully, roughly, still clumsily clicking at the latch, "if I choose for to look in here, who's agoin' to stop me?"

With one bound Monica was out of her bed and cowering behind the armoire again; just in time to avoid the blinking, half-stupid eyes of Gavaine as he peered curiously into the room.

"Be darned if somebody ain't been in that bed," muttered he, glaring at it; then he looked back over his shoulder toward his brother, with several nods and winks of tipsy significance.

In an agony of terror Monica heard the quick step of Rufus, and quick as thought took the opportunity, when Gavaine gave place for him to enter her room, to part a slit she had ruffled up in the arras behind the armoire, and to slip inside.

To her mingled terror and relief, as she pressed herself against what she supposed to be the wall, trying to stand as flat as possible, it gave way behind her, and she only prevented herself from falling with violence backward by catching with the tips of her fingers at the edges of the mysterious aperture. There she hung, breathless, motionless, while the sinister pair clamped into her late bedroom, and, though she could not see them, she knew that they were standing over her bed, and listened with suffocating terror for the impending discovery that it was still warm.

But before this fatal fact was revealed, another sound broke the stillness—the distant opening of a door and the swish of long garments across bare floors. Then Godiva's voice calling impatiently:

"Rufus—where are you, Rufus?"

"Here. Come in here," he answered, not moving from the bed, and she came in, and with a little cry of amazement joined the worthies.

"Who sleeps here?" asked Rufus.

"Nobody," she answered, wonderingly. "How did you happen in here?"

"Oh, Gavaine was fussing at the lock, and it gave. But look at the bedclothes; some one has certainly slept here lately."

A momentary silence. Then Godiva spoke sharply: "The sheets are cold enough now to have lain so since Montacute Derwent was carried a corpse out of them fifty years ago," she said, contemptuously. Evidently her delicate hand had run through them, and thanks to the slight delay in the process, as well as to the accident of Monica's having lain down

without undressing, the warmth had had time to cool. "However, I believe I see it. Yes, it must have been Aberfeld's new employee, who slept here last night. You shall hear of her anon. Meantime, attend to me," she said, decisively; then dismissed the subject, and walked away to a window, followed by her accomplices.

"If you ever win this battle," she said, impressively, "you'll have me to thank for it. For all your wit, Rufus, and your valor, Gavaine, neither of you could prevent Geoffrey Kilmyre gaining a private interview with his uncle, during which he could have made mince-meat of your plots in three minutes. But I was ready for him. I don't pay old Yorick at the inn to spy for me without sometimes getting the worth of my money. He brought me word this morning that Kilmyre had offered to speak to Aberfeld on behalf of the stranger girl who has been there for some weeks. It appears she is willing to take a subordinate position anywhere she can get it. Well, she came here yesterday, and, through his influence with Aberfeld, was accepted as assistant housekeeper, and slept in the house last night. Here, as it seems. Of course, she has nothing in this world to do with our matters, only that she arrived on the scene at the appropriate moment when we are at our wits' end for some new iniquity to father on Kilmyre, who, else, would be reinstated, to your ruin and misery. Well, having discovered that Mr. Derwent had seen the girl in the house, and had been angry with Aberfeld for admitting a stranger, also had sent her off this morning (no one knows where, but, anyway, she's out of the district), I ventured to write a little *billet-doux* in her own name (Monica Rivers—a very pretty name, too), addressed to 'My own love—my Geoffrey,' begging him to do her justice, or she 'would disclose all to his uncle'—the arch plotter paused here to laugh maliciously, and the wretches who listened joined in the laugh with admiring unctious—"and just about one minute after Master Geoffrey had got into the library with his uncle all to himself, I sent in Sykes, the purblind footman, you know, with this redoubtable missive in hand, and the significant little message that 'the young woman herself had left it for Master Geoffrey's own hand, and if he did not attend to it she'd come herself to his uncle.' I had taken the precaution to hide in the old oak credence (behind the library door, you remember), and, with the slide a hairbreadth ajar, I could both see and hear comfortably, with the trivial drawbacks of cramped limbs and an indefinite time to wait for release. However, as the game is for life or death, I risk all to win all. You may imagine the blank amazement with which Geoffrey opened and began to read the letter; and Mr. Derwent's abrupt demand to see it did not tend to calm him any. He handed it over, however, saying with tolerable firmness that he knew nothing whatever about this matter. He had seen the lady once—yesterday at the inn—and had begged Mrs. Aberfeld to give her a situation in the house, as she seemed to want one, and was an American and friendless, etc., etc.—all gospel truth, of course. But Mr. Derwent read every word of the letter carefully, getting whiter and whiter over it, and then he dashed it on the floor, and putting his foot on it ground it into fragments. He stopped poor Geoffrey's assertions with a sudden storm of fury such as I have never seen yet—I declare I expected to see him drop down dead of rage (which would have infinitely simplified matters)—Geoffrey stood his ground, and called upon Heaven to show forth not only his innocence, but the perfect innocence of the girl herself, who was incapable of a wrong thought or act, he swore. (There's more than you in love with the fair American, Gavaine—ha! ha! ha!)"

"The——!" muttered the gentleman thus rallied, with several of his usual execrations. "He'd better ware hawk; it won't be good for him if I catch him winging my game."

"Go on, dear," urged Rufus, nervously. "How did it end?"

"In our favor; the extraordinary, the unearthly violence of the master's anger, seemed in time to paralyze Geoffrey, and he was reduced to perfect silence, which of course looked like guilt. The end of it was that Mr. Derwent talked so wildly and looked so strangely, that Geoffrey actually got alarmed for his reason, and went away with his head on his breast and a heart-broken look, only saying before he left, that as sure as there was a God in Heaven he would clear Miss Rivers from the 'foul aspersions' in this 'forged letter,' and that Mr. Derwent should be the first to acknowledge the wicked wrong he was doing her in believing it one instant. When he was gone, Mr. Derwent went round and round the library, moaning and wringing his hands like one going mad. I never saw anything like it: have you been tampering with him, eh?"

"Not yet; but it's a good time to begin, and I will," said Rufus, wickedly. "But go on—how did you get away?"

"Oh, he circled round and round until I suppose he got giddy, and then he fell down in a swoon (I had no idea he was the man to let mental agitation overwhelm him so, did you?) and then I ran up here."

"Leaving him so?" asked Rufus, unable to conceal a little natural dismay.

"Certainly. Wouldn't it be the best thing for all of us if he should happen to die in such a way?" answered the woman, coldly.

"God! when you're my wife I'll have to look after you pretty sharp!" exclaimed Rufus, with an audible shudder.

The wicked woman only laughed low and jeeringly. She had long done with woman's heart and woman's tenderness; she had been unsexed, from the moment when she bartered her womanhood, kneeling in unwomanly suppliance at the feet of Otto Derwent to sue for wealth and position as his wife, to the treacherous moment when she had sought to worm from Geoffrey Kilmyre his love.

She was now naught but a brain to conceive crime, and a female shape to tempt men to achieve it for her.

In her dark, stifling concealment, Monica Derwent felt the burning blush of shame tingle over her whole body, that this demon should be counted in with the sex that was hers.

And, harsh and unjust as Otto Derwent had been to her mother and to her, she wept bitterly to think of him lying unhelped and forlorn, on the floor of his beautiful library, and that all his wealth had not been enough to buy him one loving heart.

He had thrust Geoffrey from him, poor Geoffrey, so belied—who was now to warn and save him.

But hark! What is this they are saying now?

CHAPTER XII.

"IT IS TO BEGIN TO-NIGHT."

"MYSTERIOUS being"—it is Godiva who speaks, in a sprightly tone of raillery, ghastly to hear under the circumstances—"when are we common mortals to know your scheme?"

"Don't talk of it quite yet," mumbles Rufus, hurriedly; "it makes me sick."

"Lord!" (this is Gavaine's contribution) "what a chicken I've got for a brother! While he's puling over the notion, I'd have the old chap stuck and buried."

"Ay, ay, what you would do," snarls Rufus, savagely, "but you're all body, and I'm all head. You don't feel, because you've no brains to make you. I've got the brains to plot, but unfortunately they make me feel, too. Godiva," he seems to be appealing almost mournfully to her, "oh, sweet, lovely girl, is there no way for us to do this thing except through—blood?"

"No way," she answers, coldly.

"Dear, you don't realize—how should you?" he moans. "What can your little heart know of the horrible fear and remorse of murder?"

"Don't say that word!" she suddenly shrieks, and by the sound, she has made some fierce movement that has startled the two men. "He has insulted—goaded—trampled upon me till I long for his death as a right. I will have it—it's no murder—it's my right—oh—oh—h!" and with a prolonged cry, more like that of a wounded beast than of a human being, she walks pantingly to and fro, while in dead silence the brothers look after her.

And Monica, in her hiding-place, feels herself slowly freezing into stone, but still struggles wildly against her faintness, lest she lose one syllable.

"Well, have it so," groans Rufus, after a pause.

"After all, it's the only way to be safe. Once more we have contrived to part him and his nephew without a reconciliation, but the nephew is desperate this time, because that strange woman is implicated, and he won't rest until he has cleared her. And with her, of course, himself."

"That's the talk," grins the brutal Gavaine. "I thought for all the world you was a-goin' to show the white feather. The will is made in our favor; we've seen it with our own eyes; that's all we want of the old fellow, and now, off with him!"

"Hush, you brute," shudders Rufus; "don't shout so; you're half drunk, I believe."

"And now, the means," softly and calmly interposes the peace-maker, Godiva; "you have found them?"

"Yes, all is ready; we can begin this very night," mutters Rufus. Monica's gasp almost betrays her; there is a sudden movement among the conspirators, and a long deathly pause.

"Pooh! rats in the wall or the wind among the ivy!" flouts the lady. "We must not be nervous; ha! ha! ha! why should we? We are not the first who have played a desperate game nobly and well, ay, and won it, too. What pale faces! Ha! ha! even Gavaine has mounted the 'pale ensign' of fear. Must a woman show you fortitude? Bah!" She ends with the same prolonged cry like a yell which shocked her hearers before; there is something indescribably devilish in its gnashing rage and impatience.

Rufus speaks, but hoarsely, as if awaking from a fever dream. "You will have it, then. Well, if I must—listen. There is already a man in the house who will do this for us, leaving no trace behind. It is his trade."

"Already here? Come, that is better! Who, what is he?" asks Godiva, without any emotion, save congratulation.

"He's an Italian—one of those 'confidential doctors,' you understand. He does it scientifically, is never detected, defies all the doctors in the three kingdoms to trace anything. Never failed once."

"What is his name?" asks Godiva, with gentle interest.

"Vulpino—Andrea Vulpino. I'd heard of him long ago; so I thought of him when we decided on it, yesterday. I telegraphed to him, and he came without one question by the night train. I met him at the station at Linne, and drove him here in the dead of night, while this ass, Gavaine, was snoring at his ease. He never even heard me open the window going out or returning. And Vulpino walked right through our rooms, and into the ruined half of the little blue room door. I put him in the Mummery Room; I've been with him off and on all day. He's given me enough instructions to get along without him after—after to-night, if it is to begin to-night."

"It is to begin to-night," remarked Godiva.

"He must stay several days here, though, to watch the symptoms," resumes Rufus, in a quavering voice, which vainly tries to steady itself. "Constitutions differ so much, you know; and we are going to do just enough to give Derwent the idea that he has typhoid; imagination will do the rest so naturally—so naturally that we shall be quite safe. So, he is to begin the doses to-night?"

Monica hears no more; her senses have been

slowly leaving her for some time; she feels herself falling, and puts out her hands to help herself down without noise; her body slips heavily down two or three steep steps, her head coming roughly in contact with the moist, icy stone, and then she faints.

When she recovered sense enough to raise her head the shock of the blind darkness and the reeking wet and mustiness of her prison almost frightened her into another swoon; but then she remembered where she was, and sternly composed herself.

There was no sound to be heard; she listened long and anxiously, her ear pressed to the crack of the secret door; nothing moved or breathed; so at last she ventured to open the secret panel and steal out into her bedroom. She would have only stepped into continued darkness had it not been for the broad white sheet of moonlight which streamed in at the window, silvering the antique furniture and casting strange, startling shadows beside the tall shapes which stood about the walls, for it was night now. Step by step she crept to the door of communication between her room and the room in which the brothers had begun their conference. It was empty, and the corridor gleamed beyond, through the half-open door, silent as the grave.

It might be midnight for all Monica could guess; no sound came from the inhabited portion of the house, nor one solitary bark from the dogs without. She was sinking from hunger and protracted agitation; her limbs trembled as she dragged herself along the eerie passages, now smitten on the face by some trailing pennon of spider's web, or fluttering rag of the moth-eaten banners which drooped from the steel gauntlets of the tall suits of armor which stood at intervals along the corridor; sometimes a gray streak would glide across the black and white of the moonlit floor, and with squeak and skurry vanish into a rat-hole; sometimes an apparition, palely greenish, would beckon and wave its ghostly garments from a distant hall casement, and only resolve itself into a wind-blown ivy spray, when her heart was in her throat and her blood had turned to ice; yet she dragged herself resolutely on and on, determined to obtain admission to her father's room at any risk—determined never to leave him until he had heard all that she had to tell him.

Gone were all her pride and anger; she did not care, now, whether he insulted or caressed her, so as he would only listen; she was ready to rivet his attention at any cost, ay, even if she had to tell him that she was his daughter, and witness the shame and disgust with which he perceived this relic of his buried misalliance drifted up at his feet by the relentless waves of Time; she was ready for any cruelty, any disdain, any unjust and goading suspicions—if only she could warn him in time against his murderers!"

And as she went she wept to think that her mother had loved this unhappy man for naught, and that she could never now thank and bless her faithful child for saving him from death; and she sighed in her bursting heart, to God:

"Oh, that he would love me by and by!"

On and on crept Monica, through the ghostly castle, on, on, on; waxing fainter and weaker, and marveling dully why she was never reaching the little low-browed, iron-studded door that separated the uninhabited half of the mansion from the modernized portion; she rested, kneeling on the cold flags, for she feared to open any of the creaking doors along her route, to seek a seat within; then she set out again and as before crept onward.

She came to a door that stood ajar, a sheet of moonlight streamed through it; she looked and listened long, then crept in.

And then she uttered a shocked cry; for she had come back to her own bedroom; all her wanderings had been for naught, she had merely wearied herself vainly among the labyrinthine passages.

Her strength was gone, she staggered to the bed and just reached it before her senses left her for the second time.

How the night passed she never exactly knew, but at last gray dawn shone in upon her eyelids, which were quivering in an agony of nervousness; and with it came the sudden musical winding of a distant hunting horn.

The hunt was to meet at the Weald that morning.

She now recollected that Mrs. Aberfeld had told her; a dozen or more of the neighboring gentry would ride to the Meet, accompanied by the bolder of their ladies; already the distant signal was answered from the Weald, as Derwent's huntsman arrived from his home in the forest to the kennels behind the mansion; where were kept three or four packs of the finest hounds, stag and fox hunters, in the country.

Monica sprung to the window; the aurora beams of the brilliant spring morning were spreading over the sky in fan-shaped effulgence, but the court-yard beneath seemed dark as a well yet, filled as it was with shadow; she soon, however, distinguished the hurrying figures of the domestics passing and re-passing in all the bustle of preparations for the huntsmen's breakfast; presently the immense two-leaved doors of the rear archway were swung wide, and the red light which morning diffused on the still atmosphere, gushed in, in a broad ruby lane, in the glory of which came a gay host of scarlet-coated and dark-habited hunters of both sexes, mounted on noble animals, the latter capering and pawing in their lusty freshness. Up rung the silver peals of gay ladies' laughter, and the deep musical tones of the men; grooms in various liveries obsequiously sprung to assist the delicate long-robed figures to alight, cavaliers doffed their caps to invisible ladies at the upper windows, and the remote baying of eager dogs mingled with the clash and bruit; a merry scene, at which the unknown daughter of the house gazed with sick eyes, strained to see her father.

But she knew that last night the murderers had begun their hellish work, and she scarcely expected to see him.

She was wrong; a sudden accession of the merry voices indicated the appearance of some more distinguished personage, and into the broad lane of red light strode the Master of Dornoch-Weald, clad for the field, and looking exactly as usual. And, as ever, at either elbow slunk the curs, Rufus and Gavaine Marshall.

He was going out for the day in their company; who could say *what might happen to him* during the day?

And nobody to avert peril! Nobody to whisper warning! He was left to his fate!

"Oh, Geoffrey Kilmyre, where are you?" wept Monica, wringing her hands in despair.

For she knew that Geoffrey Kilmyre was made of the stuff that scorns to forsake the helpless, whatever the provocation. And he had been warned by Godiva; he *knew* that these low-born curs were not to be trusted; where, where was he?

Then a thrill, half anguish half a sudden, sweet, passionate gratitude, swept through the pure heart of Monica, for she suddenly *knew where Geoffrey was*. He was searching for her, that he might prove her innocence of the vile forgery which had blasted her fair fame in the eyes of his uncle.

So that his uncle was left unprotected, unsuspecting, already the work of death begun upon him—not a soul to save him!

For a few minutes the young girl lost all courage, all faculty to plan, and raved madly to the heavens to perform a miracle on Otto Derwent's behalf, not to abandon him to his murderers; confessing how wicked her intentions had been in coming here, but crying wildly for mercy! mercy! And oh, *not* to punish her in this horrible, irrevocable way!

At that moment a thought came to her like a flash of inspiration. It went prickling through her hair, over all her tingling body, darting through her heart—it was electrical.

"Some of the ladies are veiled thickly—why not I? I WILL GO WITH MY FATHER."

This was her thought.

And she had never in her life been on a horse's back, and it was a stag-hunt upon which the cavalcade was bound; did she know at all what that was like? Yes, well she knew it, for Monica was an omnivorous reader, and had devoured many a spirited account of the mad swing over moor and fen and through the thick black tree-trunks after the flying monarch of the woods.

"It is the only way—it *must*, *must* be done," she said.

CHAPTER XIII.

"MY LIFE BEFORE HIS!"

FROM the instant when the brave girl resolved upon this desperate scheme, all things seemed to smooth before her, every obstacle to melt away, and, instead of inanimate objects getting in her way after their perverse wont, they seemed to lead themselves—everything she came in contact with—to her purpose.

Never had a mad undertaking been so easy of achievement as this of the devoted daughter to save her father's life.

Things happened something thus:

While the bedazzlement of her purpose was still upon her, she looked down and saw the dainty, slim form of Godiva, clad bewitchingly in an opal-tinted morning-robe, with her roseate arms gleaming bare to the flowing lace at the elbow. She was moving in and out among the stiffer and more masculine figures of the huntresses, in lovely contrast; evidently she was not going with the hunt, and yet was coquette enough to present her floral beauty, enhanced by the stiff toilets of the other ladies, to some favored eye, even at the risk of dragging her indolent, ease-loving limbs forth from her couch at three o'clock of the morning.

Monica had been through all the house, we know; she knew the inhabited portion of it much better than the other, and, once she had escaped from these mysterious labyrinths, could find her way to any room.

Whenever she saw Godiva, she told herself:

"Now is your chance to get a riding-habit," and once more trusting herself to the corridors, which had been the scene of her half-delirious wanderings, she sped straight to the low-browed door, and from thence, swift and unerringly, to Godiva's apartments.

Fearful that the lady's maid might be there, she was cautious in her entrance. But Florice was deep in flirtation below with Lord Glenfillan's valet, and the long, dim, sumptuous suit was left to itself, with no better guard against intrusion than the key turned in the antechamber lock.

Monica flitted in, her black silk skirts gathered tight about her in case of rustling, and her black eyes gleaming with a resolution that would have daunted the fair mistress of the dainty splendor she looked upon had she met her then, face to face.

Godiva, the distant relative of proud Derwent, lodged well under the roof of him she had plotted to murder; her taste was obviously and determinately modern, and not one stick of the magnificent old furniture that so ravished connoisseurs had been permitted to remain within her regions.

Frescoing, satin-and-silver hangings, velvet carpets, mirrors of crystal-and-silver in true Venetian style, silver chairs and divans, gorgeously framed pictures, the subjects of which were forgotten in the overpowering frames which surrounded them; showy bric-a-brac, shimmering cages, with brilliantly-plumaged but mute birds; heaps upon heaps of gayly-bound books, the leaves uncut; of lustrous garments, lovingly displayed where their owner's eyes would fall upon them the first thing on awaking in the morning; the blue-and-lace bed, with silver-tissue hangings and sachet-counterpane—all that eye could see loudly proclaimed the secret nature of Godiva Montacute—her love, nay, her crav-

ing greed of costliness and ease, luxurious lavishness and sensuous delights; for she had none of that purer, more elevating love of beauty for beauty's own noble sake, nor the instinct, God-given, which sees a loveliness in the commonest wayside flower far beyond the flaunting glory of the scentless exotic, and in all beauty that Heaven and goodness symbolized.

In passing through the three intervening chambers which opened into one another, *a la* Indian cabinet, before she reached the final one, the dressing-room, Monica Derwent unconsciously perceived all this—unconsciously, I say, for at the time her whole heart and mind were bent on her present purpose, and she was not aware that she had had time to receive any impressions until afterward.

Still favored by capricious accident, she went unerringly on until she found herself before an exquisitely inlaid Japanese wardrobe, the majestic light of which seemed to indicate that it was used for hanging dresses whose long trains required more than usual space. As it was ajar, Monica was instantly running her clever, deft hands over the various folds of silk and rich material which filled the dark interior. She came anon to the heavy, smooth folds of a cloth garment, took it off its hook, and saw what she sought—an elegantly-made riding-habit of invisible green. A cap of the same color was attached to the costume, and a pair of delicate white riding-gauntlets in the pockets of it; she looked for the accompanying whip in the bottom of the wardrobe, and found it also. With these things in her arms she glided from the dangerous locality, and, shutting herself into the first room she came to in the uninhabited half of the house, had the satisfaction of soon seeing herself reflected in a dim, cobweb-draped mirror—an equestrian figure of as much elegance and fashion as any lady of them all.

She finished her toilet by winding thickly and securely a long black tissue veil round and round her small cap, after which she might have defied the eyes of her own mother to recognize her.

Then she hid her own costume in one of the curious old cabinets that were there, locked up the ingeniously puzzling recess in which she had placed it, and put the key in her pocket.

And now to obtain a horse, and ride into the forest while the party were safely out of the way at breakfast.

Here, too, fate befriended her.

She walked quietly through the most private passages which she knew would eventually lead her to the court-yard, meeting one or two servants on the way, who, however, only stared at her, not venturing to address what they supposed to be one of the stranger ladies lounging through the corridors for curiosity; and soon she was standing, with an air of languid indifference, on the ladies' mounting-block, looking about her.

A footman in the Derwent livery edged near her, cap in hand, ready for orders. She abruptly turned to him, saying, in a petulant voice:

"Have you happened to see any one waiting here? I mean Lord—but no matter; sha'n't wait for him. Order a horse brought round for me—*instantly*, you hear?"

She tossed him a sovereign which she had just found in the tiny silver-net *pochette* at Godiva's girdle, and he, very properly impressed by her imperious air, bowed obsequiously, and ran to give the order to the head groom.

In three minutes a helper came trotting along into the court, holding loosely by the bridle a superb hunting mare, whose steel-gray coat, satin of sheen, small lean head, taper ears, quivering muscles, and large, soft, brilliant eyes, spoke unequivocally of blood—of race, all over her; and sent a shiver of nameless excitement through the very heart-fibers of the untried rider.

Many people have watched the approach of a wild beast with less sickening apprehension than did poor Monica that of her father's queen of the stud.

But she was committed to this course, however desperate—she, like the beautiful animal now prancing before the mounting-block in the exuberance of her spirits, felt the proud blood of an ancient race tingling through her delicate body; she set her teeth to keep them from chattering, gathered her flowing skirts in one hand, placing the other daintily on the obsequious groom's offered shoulder, and sprang into the saddle.

As she settled in her lofty seat, and saw the proud neck of the impatient animal arching itself before her, her courage came back, her heart swelled high, and in a sort of reckless delight in her danger she patted that glossy neck with her little firm hand, then tightening the reins as she had seen other riders do, off sprang the mare with a snort of pleasure, through the archway and away.

After the first giddy feeling, and convulsive effort to accommodate herself to the poise and motion, Monica settled in her saddle with the fearless grace of a born equestrienne. How could she be awkward here, with her straight, well-poised form, her brave soul, her inborn presence of mind, and her exuberance of young spirit, which laughed at bodily peril and enjoyed the rush and the ecstasy of daring?

Hearing the sound of hoofs behind her, she looked back, to see the same groom in Derwent livery in attendance. This reassured her more than ever, for she saw that she had got off under the very best of auspices, and would inevitably be mistaken by all for one of the mansion's guests, gone off by herself in pique, which mood would also account for her thick veil and jealously concealed features.

She allowed her mount to carry her down the avenue out of sight of the mansion, then, having somewhat familiarized herself to her position, she reined in the docile beauty and waited for the groom to ride up.

"Conduct me to a point which the hunt is sure to pass," she commanded the man. "and let us ride

slowly, so that you shall give me a few instructions, for I have never been on horseback before," and she laughed as if it was a good joke.

The man's eyes opened wide in amazement and concern; he looked as closely as he dared into the veiled face, dying to see which of the ladies was so daring.

"And don't you go and tell it, either," she continued, petulantly; "I'm not going to be laughed at for a madcap, and lectured and hectored by all the old fogies and prudes—and I mean to enjoy one deer-hunt if I never go home alive," and she shrugged her shoulders and laughed mockingly, doing the character of a spoiled beauty so successfully that Giles made up his mind on the spot that he had the luck to be the sole protector and riding-master *pro tem.* of the lovely romp, Lady Madge Devlin, whose pranks kept the Weald alive; and he grinned to himself as he anticipated the holy horror of her straight-laced chaperone, Dowager Lythwicke, and the terror of her adorer, Lord Francis Traine, when they discovered this maddest of all her freaks.

But she was as celebrated for her boundless liberality in the matter of sovereigns as for her mirthful follies, and Giles was well content to earn her gratitude; so, as he touched his hat he vowed that "ne'er a soul should hear from *him* a word o' the matter," and that "he'd take right good care of her, only she must folly his instructions, my lady, for that 'Silky Sylph,' thar, wor a rare 'un to go, onc't she took inter her pretty head that them as rode her didn't know their business."

Having thus shown the grave necessity of his services, the pair went ambling side by side over the long green stretches of the home park, while Monica took her first lesson, hanging on the words of the old fellow with all her mind and brain, and really learning more in that half-hour than any one not pressed by a matter of life and death could have learned in a week.

So that when the long-echoing bugle-call rung through the wood, and the distant thunder showed that the hunters were sweeping forth from the gates in grand cavalcade, she, sitting at rest on a gentle eminence, screened from observation by a hazel copse, felt so secure that she sent her attendant on a wild-goose chase to fetch her a branch of silky catkins from a poplar half down the hill; and then, lifting her veil, she coolly took the field-glass from its case on her saddle, and watched the approach of the Master of Dornoch and his guests, as they came merrily forth, with their array of beaters, dogs, huntsmen, and other supernumeraries requisite to a hunt of such distinction.

Hal! there they come, the scarlet coats burning red among the tender green leaves, the riding-habits floating gracefully, bridles glancing, noble horses spurning the yielding turf as they breast the hill, dogs in leash by twos, by sixes, by dozens, running swiftly, mute and attentive to their keepers' whips; a gallant sight it is.

But as Monica sees the ominous figure of Rufus Marshall glided to her father's side, Gavaine tracking him in the rear, the involuntary pleasure dies out of her flushed face, and the gloom of death overspreads it.

"Now for it!" she mutters, as she returns the glass to its place and drops her veil; "My life before his!"

CHAPTER XIV.

BETWEEN TWO FOES.

SHE let the train sweep past her, then slipped from her covert and joined the rear guard, so deftly that not an eye noted the fresh arrival.

Now, I am not going to describe a hunt, which has so often and so gloriously been described before that my amateurish efforts would only sound like a travesty; suffice it to say that as long as the beaters reported naught, the hounds kept mute, and the riders held together, the veiled huntress rode among the rest, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, and so grandly ignoring the cavaliers who came in turn to woo her from her incognita, that half the men were wild to find her out, and all the women were staring with uplifted noses at the graceful puzzle who thus dared to attract all the eyes their own loveliness was wont to hold enchained. And yet, no one guessed that she was a stranger, not only to the Weald, but to the gentry who had come to join in the hunt from the neighborhood.

As for Derwent and his two sleuth-hounds the Marshalls, they were well on in front, and did not see her at all.

But when the view-holla at last came, and the hounds broke into full cry, and the cavalcade spread in a wide fan after the streaming hounds, and every face was alight with excitement, *then* the veiled lady shot to the front and edging resolutely between the Master of Dornoch and Rufus Marshall, rode by her father bridle by bridle, mute, thrilling, and her eyes gleaming at him through her veil, like twin stars, that shot the strangest feeling through him.

"And who is this bold Diana?" laughed Mr. Derwent in graceful playfulness.

"One who has a boon to crave of the Master of Dornoch-Weald," she replied in the same vein, and in carefully-disguised accents.

"Ah? And what is that?" asked he, curiously trying to recognize her, for the voice was as unfamiliar as the figure.

"Let me be your sole companion for one hour! No, it is no jest—I mean it," she cried, laughing. "More hangs upon this interview than you can imagine."

He could do nothing else than bow gracious consent. She was, he supposed, if not one of his own visitors, one of the neighbors. Some mad-cap young girl, tent on some mischievous freak which she wanted his assistance or consent to bring about. Without a single suspicion he nodded his sleuth-

hounds to drop back, and rode on with no one by his side save the mysteriously veiled lady.

She let him lead her in a swift canter across lots which brought them well up with the chase, and then they came to a pause on the crown of a hill-lock, and breathed their chargers, while the hunt swept on in merry train; and when scarlet, Lincoln-green, glancing metal and streaming hounds were all out of sight, and the dark, questioning eyes of Mr. Derwent were turned upon his silent companion, she said gravely, still hiding her identity:

"This is no hoax, sir, nor any attempt at comedy at all. Be good enough to alight with me, and while we rest on that mossy log, I shall speak."

For a moment he gazed suspiciously at her, a passing thought of his nephew suggesting a possible intercessor; but she continued mute, and with a slight shrug of the shoulder he obeyed her.

They sat side by side on the mossy log, the sounds of horses and riders fading far away, and nothing heard but the rustling of the young leaves and the splash of the runlet at their feet from its rocky source.

She began to speak, softly, solemnly, her hands clasped.

"I have a terrible thing to tell you, Mr. Derwent; I don't expect you to be able to believe it at first, for it is almost incredible, but for your own sake you must promise to sift my statements at once, and allow yourself to believe such proofs as you will then inevitably find. Will you promise this?"

The proud Derwent gazed in astonishment at his companion, doubting her sincerity.

"This is a most extraordinary address!" he exclaimed. "Are you not jesting?"

"As God lives, I am not," she answered, firmly. Then she rapidly proceeded, her fear of interruption urging her on with breathless haste and insistence, and he listening and looking at her in growing amazement.

"The day before yesterday I chanced to be walking in the forest over there—you see the knoll? There, by the hollow oak tree"—she pointed with her whip, and Mr. Derwent glanced at the familiar spot designated, and back again at her with a feeling of reality unknown before. "I sat down to rest just there," she continued, anxiously trying to say all in as few words as she might, and always with that dread upon her of interruption, "and Miss Godiva Montacute came up the hill; it was between eleven and twelve in the morning. Can you recollect where you were at the time? The day before yesterday, you know!"

"Yes! yes! I recollect; proceed," muttered he in his bewilderment.

"Geoffrey Kilmyre joined her, and she talked a long while with him, urging him to come and be reconciled to you; she also told him that your life was in danger from the schemes of your two kinsmen, Rufus and Gavaine Marshall, who were here merely to plot for a place in your will, taking advantage of your nephew's present disgrace—"

"Stop, madam; who are you?" cried Mr. Derwent peremptorily. "I permit no stranger to meddle with my family matters."

"Pardon me—pardon me," she implored. "I must speak, let me finish before I unvail—"

"Madam, I believe I know you," he said, abruptly, rising from her side. "I will not hear another word!"

"You *shall* hear, all!" she exclaimed, resolutely, rising too, and barring his way to the horses; "it is for your life's sake that I speak, and *you do not know me—you could never dream who I am!*" This told, he stopped in wonder; her tone had carried conviction with it; whoever she was (and he had begun to suspect that Monica Rivers once more addressed him), she spoke the truth, and he felt a spell upon him to stand and hear.

"Geoffrey Kilmyre proudly refused to fawn upon you for favor, or to seek you merely as a matter of self-interest, as Miss Montacute at first urged him; but whenever she hinted at personal danger for you, he vowed to go at once and warn you, and left her on that errand. Miss Montacute was then joined by Rufus Marshall, with whom she plotted your death."

The veiled lady's voice had sunk and sunk as the horror of her tale deepened, until now she was almost whispering the dreadful words in the ear of the staring and shocked Derwent; she here suddenly broke off in her narrative and wrung her hands, hysterically moaning out: "And oh God! how I have tried to save you since, and you would not listen—and last night again when I lay hidden in the ruined wing of your house, the three conspirators came there to confer—Rufus, Gavaine and Godiva—and they spoke of your death! The brothers said that 'now the will was made in their favor it was time to get rid' of you—and they have an accomplice hidden in the Muniment Room—a poisoning doctor—and—" here the excitement of the girl passed beyond her control, and she clutched the arm of her father with one convulsive hand while with the other she tore off her veil, exposing the death-pale face and quivering, imploring lips and eyes of the stranger American, whom Mr. Derwent believed to be the accomplice of Geoffrey Kilmyre.

He gave an involuntary start, and tried to wrest himself from her grasp, then waited to collect himself, regarding her fixedly the while, as if he would read her very soul.

What memories passed over him as they thus stood, face to face, shuddering under the shadow of Foul Play; what distrusts, long thrust aside—intuitions stifled—natural repulsions sternly quelled in the angered pain and revenge of his quarrel with his nephew Geoffrey; what vivid perceptions of the disgusting contrast between these new favorites he had inserted in his will, and his old well-beloved nephew and heir—how all these passed and repassed before his awakened consciousness, it is unnecessary to

say; a window seemed suddenly to have sprung open in his brain, and he looked forth on a hideous reality that shocked and sickened him. And yet, such were his secret sensations in connection with this name of Rivers, borne by this girl of America, combining, as he believed, the disgrace and shame of his life, that in spite of all his horrified convictions that she spoke but the awful truth, he could not receive it from her, but actually kept on associating her in his mind with that composite image of mercenary-adventuress and frail female which had been presented to him first. Yet, as he examined the delicate countenance of her, so eloquent now with truthful urgency, he found it impossible to treat her rudely, impossible to shake her off unceremoniously, as he had done when she came to him at the dead of night with—he now saw—the same warning; and it was with a strange mingling of deference and incredulity that he last spoke.

"Young lady, by what strange fate have you thus come from the ends of the earth, with a name that I abhor, and from a family that sent a traitress into my life to blight it forever, to mix yourself with my affairs? What do you expect to gain?"

"Spare me these insults—think only of what I have revealed to you!" she exclaimed, with flashing scorn and urgency. "I swear it to you that I hope to gain *nothing* from you, however true you find my story, however much you may be indebted to me for escaping a pair of intended murderers, hounded on by a Jezebel, who has sworn to be revenged upon the man who refused her proffered love (you see I know all)—"

"You do indeed, and far too much to have come to you by fair means!" he cried, enraged. "How long have you been spying on me and my household?"

"Why will you think of *me*? Oh, God! Think of yourself!" she implored. "I tell you they said that they would begin under the poisoner's orders—to do *it*—(meaning your murder) last night! What did they give you to eat last night?—or to drink? Have they tampered with you yet? Are you well to-day? Are you quite, quite as usual?"

As she poured forth these horror-inspiring questions in burning earnest he could not but shudder under a sharp conviction of her truth; and indeed, how could mortal be such a finished actress as to banish every particle of blood from the cheek, to dilate the eyes black and glaring, to imbue the slight soft hands of a slim girl like this with the convulsed strength of those two that clung to his arm, and shook it in the intensity of her prayers?

"Come, sit again, and tell me this matter all over, calmly, please. And remember, every syllable will be sifted afterward," said he.

She could scarce believe that heaven had become so kind; she was to be allowed to save him after all.

He caught the swift flash of her thankful eyes rising heavenward, and the trembling smile of joy that stirred the beauty of her delicate mouth; and again his heart said loudly, "The girl speaks true; listen to her."

Side by side once more, and Monica detailed word for word all that she had heard in the forest, then in the ruined chamber. He questioned and cross-questioned her keenly; she made not one misstatement, not one blunder.

"This is all very dramatic and sensational," he remarked, with cool cynicism, which, however, his deadly pallor belied; "and eminently calculated to make you an object of interest, and perhaps of gratitude, if I find your revelations to be the truth. I think I see your game, my shrewd lady-Yankee; but, oh, heaven! how intolerable that one so young and lovely should so unsex herself." The appeal seemed to escape him in spite of himself; his clear, searching eyes were striving to probe her very soul, wrath and scorn fighting for supremacy.

Monica was dragged back to herself in spite of her resolutions by the tacit insult. It was impossible for her to let it pass.

"How *dare* you judge me! What *can* you know of my nature?" she demanded, in low, quivering tones, involuntarily stepping close to him, and meeting his scornful eye with a blaze of noble rebellion.

He looked at her. She was so close that he could see the panting rise and fall of her bosom, the play of the delicate muscles about the mouth, the exquisite satin of her skin, and the raven silk of her hair.

"How came you by the face and form of my ancestress, Mistress Ethelgiva Derwent?" he cried, perplexedly. "You are a Derwent, hair for hair."

Monica forgot all but that this was her father. She suddenly put out her two trembling hands, and clasped him.

"Am I so like one of your race?" she whispered, a flame of excitement appearing in each cheek. "Well, then, since you think so, you will the more readily receive the truth; for the truth I will now tell you, in spite of the injury you have inflicted upon your innocent, true-hearted wife, Ada Rivers."

The fatal words were checked on her lips. A horseman had ridden up, and, with a low ejaculation of amazement, drew up and leaped to the ground with hands outstretched.

The stranger was Mr. Joaquin Price, the junior partner of Korner & Price, the New York lawyers who had ferreted out the rights of Otto Derwent's quarrel with his wife.

"Aha! *Thought* you too sensible to throw away such a fortune," chuckled the young man, convinced that all was explained between father and daughter, and that it would be his safe and simple duty to reveal the truth of the mistake which had parted man and wife.

Standing there with the slight hand of the stunned Monica in his, and the frigid apparition of her father behind her, Mr. Price suddenly, and with that native sagacity which has since made him such a successful lawyer, saw in a glance that father and daughter

were as yet *not* united; nay, that there was suspicion, scorn, and bitter misconception between them.

He drew in his horns instantaneously, and became limp and passive, waiting for more light.

Meantime, Monica had recalled her wits, and was debating in her mind the question whether she should now reveal herself, accepting unavoidably the assistance of Mr. Price, now that he was here, and since he only could disclose the real facts of the mistake which had separated husband and wife.

No; it would look too like a mercenary plot gotten up between the daughter and the sharp young lawyer. No, Monica could not *now* reveal herself.

She disengaged her hand from the lawyer's congratulating clasp, and said coldly:

"You are mistaken, sir. I am as much a stranger here as yourself," and she enforced her meaning by a significant glance.

"All right, if you must have it so," muttered the young man, in visible chagrin. "I suppose you know your own business best."

Mr. Derwent, glancing from one to the other with a sneer, here made a slight obeisance to Monica, and strode away, leading his horse.

CHAPTER XV.

AT LAST.

MR. PRICE, brimming over with importance, turned eagerly to Monica. She was looking after her father with an expression of utter despair.

"You could not have chosen a more fatal moment to interrupt my interview with Mr. Derwent," said she distractedly.

"Eh? What? I hope, madam, I haven't been so infernally unlucky as to spoil the game?" returned the lawyer, his mind full of the monetary aspect of the case.

She made an impatient gesture, and turned away. What had she in common with this man? But he had not expended his hundred dollars to cross the ocean, to be ignored in this manner.

"By the signs, I perceive that as yet you have not been able to prove to your father your relationship," he blandly began. She flashed upon him with sudden wild anger.

"Wretch!" she cried, "is there nothing in the world for you but money? Go away, you enrage me with your paltry plots and counter-plots; while—oh, good God! *he is doomed!*" She broke off here. What was the use of telling this base grub the terror that was upon her?

Mr. Price stared hard at her; of course he was all abroad with regard to the actual state of matters; he thought that this high-stomached young lady was writhing under the affronts put upon her by her own father, who would not receive her as his child; "and no wonder," thought Mr. Price, "the infatuated girl has not the facts to show, which would bring the proud Derwent on his knees to the child of his martyred Ada." He gently placed himself in her path, when she would have escaped him, and took up the case where it had been dropped by her in the office in New York, scarcely a month ago.

"We only, as you are aware, hold a secret which will inevitably clear away all obstacles between Mr. Derwent and yourself," said he impressively, and she in her heart-broken perplexity could not do anything but stand and listen. "We only can so positively vindicate the character of the late Mrs. Derwent that her long-estranged husband will receive (with every wish to repair past injuries,) her daughter. Command me, Miss Derwent; say the word, and you are received by the proprietor of all this grand estate as daughter and heiress."

Cold as a stone she heard him out; his appeals to her self-interest she only dimly comprehended and resented with a fierce passing scorn, but his reminder that he knew that secret which would clear her mother's character in the eyes of her father, flashed with a sudden and dazzling allurements before her.

O, to show forth the purity of her poor dead mother—to be received as *her* daughter with honor—and then have the right to cling to her father, and to save his life—because *then* he would listen to her.

Fired by this burning hope, she said:

"Sir, I came here with no intention to profit by my father's wealth, but merely to see for myself what manner of man he was. I have not revealed myself to him, and have no wish to do so, unless my mother's memory is vindicated, and he is wishful for her sake to acknowledge me. You say you have learned a secret that will do all this;—I am now as anxious to hear it as I was before resolute not to hear it. It is needless to defend my motives from your suspicions. I know they are not mercenary, that is enough for me. Now, sir, tell me this mystery."

Mr. Price could with difficulty repress his delight. He had crossed the Atlantic with the expectation of having to go through no end of finessing in order to sell the secret advantageously to Mr. Derwent; and here was the contumacious heiress herself suing for it—who in the world would be so willing to pay dearly for the knowledge as she, who would receive such rich benefit thereby?

"Good—I thought you would see the sense of our advice," said he as coolly as he could;—"the pecuniary side of the question out of sight altogether, how pleasant to prove the undeviating virtue of your deceased mother, so cruelly and unjustly belied for nineteen years! I confess I had expected to have to apply to Mr. Derwent himself, but since you have seen the matter in its true light, you are the best one to negotiate the matter with. And now, to business. Already we, that is, my partner and myself, have given our valuable time and talent to this matter, besides disbursing a considerable sum in our investigations. It only remains now for me to name the sum at which we value our services, past and future; we are entirely prepared to trust to your honor to repay us whenever you are instated in

your proper position as the daughter of Mr. Otto Derwent. You understand?"

She did, and once more her very soul rose up in revolt at the whole transaction the mercenary aspect of which revolted her.

"What? and am I to count beforehand upon my father's generosity, to promise you so much of the spoil before you do my dead mother justice?" she exclaimed with passionate contempt; "no, let me never be known as his daughter—let my sweet mother lie in her grave undisturbed—I will make no league with a man of your character. These base calculations revolt me. I can have nothing to do with such. Let me alone; God will clear my mother's name in his own good time. She need never be beholden to you, who will only sell the secret of her goodness for money which it degrades me to count upon."

"You are mad," retorted Mr. Price in high wrath at her scorn. "You can do nothing without us, and you flout our way of doing business! I tell you, you are laughably obstinate. You may prove your relationship to the deceased Mrs. Derwent, but we only can prove your relationship to Mr. Otto Derwent. That secret is ours, and we mean to sell it to the highest bidder. If you will not treat with us for it, Mr. Otto Derwent will. Do you fully comprehend that?"

With a glance of utter disdain, Monica turned from him and walked away further into the wood.

"There goes a fool!" laughed the young sharper, bitterly. "Did lunatic ever deserve a strait-jacket more? Very good; since she won't let me espouse her cause I shall espouse my own. And now to discover who will pay most for this secret of ours, the father himself, or his expectant heirs, the two Marshalls. Humph! I fancy I can manipulate them to some solid advantage. Meantime, let her look out! No use for her to claim relationship now! I am ready to prove her an impostor. Ha! ha! ha! I think I can be even with you yet, Miss Monica Derwent!"

Monica hurried to rejoin her father; her fears for him ever rising above all thoughts of self, and driving her perforce to watch by him; she was stunned by the fresh complications of her lot, and as yet knew not how to arrange her future course; all she could do at present was to hasten back to guard him by her presence, if he would not take her warnings and guard himself.

As she passed through the glancing lights and darkening shadows of the budding glades, she heard a distant whining and pattering; one of the dogs, she thought, had lost the scent and was whimpering by himself as he strove to rejoin his fellows.

She found Mr. Derwent very near the spot where he had left her, no one by him but Gavaine Marshall. As the two men saw her approach, a singular expression crossed each face, Gavaine looking unaccountably startled by her appearance on the scene, and anger, perplexity, contempt, all blending in the scathing glance Mr. Derwent flung toward her; which he pointed ruthlessly by assuming an ostentatious air of confidence toward the young man. Yet Monica advanced fearlessly; very pale and earnest she looked, and so dignified in her mien that for all his distrust he could not ignore her as he would have ignored any other intruder.

"You have still added wonders to disclose?" cried he, disdainfully.

She stepped in front of him, and her truthful eyes looked straight into his.

"For God's sake, believe what I have told you," she said.

"I will, when you have explained who and what you are, and your motive in coming here," he retorted.

She was silent; an iron hand seemed to be crushing her heart.

If she had dared to prove to him her relationship to him, would he not listen to her then?

And she dared not do it, until she could explain away the miserable secret which had estranged him from her mother.

Had she done well in refusing to buy this secret of the lawyer at any price? This secret which would have given her the power to save her father?

And again—could she ever have expected a proud nature like his to receive with honor or respect one who had presumed to count upon his wealth beforehand?

As she stood there, racked by these conflicting thoughts, her eyes fixed in sorrowful anguish upon her doomed father's, and her hands unconsciously pressing her aching heart, the pattering and whimpering she had heard before came close; a great tawny deerhound ran into the middle of the group, his eyes red and gleaming, his tongue hanging smoking from his slavering jaws, and white foam-flecks spattered over his sinewy chest.

There was something so unusual about the appearance of the animal to the practiced eye of Mr. Derwent that he uttered a low shocked cry, and involuntarily seizing Monica by the arm, whirled her behind him. At the same moment a wild yell came from the copse, and with the agility of an ape Gavaine Marshall swung himself into the branches of the tree under which they had been standing; and was scarcely settled six feet from the ground when he unsheathed his hunting-knife, aimed, and hurled it at the dog.

It pierced one of his ears and stuck there, the dark blood dying his delicate fawn-color in an instant and a howl and frantic bound in the air attesting to his pain and terror.

The event of the next few seconds passed like a flash; Monica at the time did not even comprehend it; it took her anxious piecing together of the various features of the scene after all was past to give her the whole matter coherently.

This is what happened in the space of, say, six seconds:

As the wounded brute leaped in the air in his sur-

prise—for he had not seen Marshall's flight into the tree—Rufus appeared at the edge of the copse, and with every appearance of consternation worked his features and gesticulated like a madman, no sound issuing from his lips; the hound reached the ground and leaped up at Mr. Derwent's throat, seemingly with the one convulsed effort. He swerved, quick as thought, and the animal landed with its two fore paws on his shoulder, its glaring eyes and snapping jaws close to the face of Monica, who was behind, between him and the trunk of the tree; Gavaine stretched down his hand from the branch exactly above their heads, where he was lying at full length, and Monica distinctly saw him seize the knife in the dog's ear, tear it out and make a blind sort of desperate stab straight down into Mr. Derwent's breast! Simultaneously Rufus fired his gun into the middle of the group, the bullet whizzing past Mr. Derwent's ear, grazing Monica's hair as it passed through her veil, and lodged in the tree an inch behind her; and, too, she saw at that same instant the long flashing fangs of the dog fasten with a click in the side of Mr. Derwent's neck.

Then a strange strength entered into her, and a sense of superhuman perception of the one thing to do, and power to do it; and she saw—for she could not feel—her own two hands grasping the grisly windpipe of the dog, clutching tight as a vise the elastic baggy skin and muscular bones and sinews beneath it—dragging the convulsed and struggling bulk down—down, while her father's two hands tore at the kicking and contorting body and struck at it in a frenzy, and while he reeled and staggered about under the furious scratching of the paws, and the sickening tearing and gashing of his flesh between those iron jaws; then came another report, another whizzing bullet, more blind flashing stabs of the knife wielded from above, downward always, not into the dog's body, but always into her father's; and then at last (and oh, it seemed as if a long hour must have passed!) Monica felt the brawny throat grow flaccid in her gripe, the struggling ceased abruptly, and the dog dropped heavily to the ground, his red eyes bulging from their sockets, and his tongue lolling out between bloody jaws.

She lifted her eyes and looked into her father's. And she read in their dim and swimming depths that he believed her now—that he knew what these traitors had done to him.

And, ah, the piteous appeal in those proud, dominant eyes; the wild dismay, horror, sorrow, and prayer.

As he reeled back against the tree she caught him in her arms, and sunk beneath his swooning weight to her knees—his head upon her panting breast, the big tears from her swelling heart dropping on his ghastly face; then Rufus ran up, his smoking gun in hand, and Gavaine dropped from his perch, the gory knife in his clasp. And they stood together over the father and daughter, the rigid heap of dead dog-flesh beside them; they panted and wiped the sweat from their reeking brows, and glanced vacantly at each other, and for a while seemed as if they dared not look anywhere else. Then Rufus kicked the carcass of the hound over, and pointing with the toe of his foot, said:

"One of my shots did for him; look here." He muttered so quaveringly that Monica could not have understood him had he not been so close; and Gavaine stammered in answer as falteringly:

"What the deuce does it all mean?"

Then they both looked with one accord down at Mr. Derwent, and meeting his half-open eyes resting solemnly upon them, with the film of unconsciousness fast drawing over them, Rufus spoke up with sudden distinctness:

"Mean? Why, don't you see, man, the devilish brute was mad?"

And Monica felt a fierce convulsion pass over the frame she clasped, and his hand going to the gaping wound in his neck, and then he uttered a terrible cry, and was senseless.

And she in turn fastened upon the craven faces of the murderers a look so strange, so flashing with comprehension and dark with vengeance, that they grew white, and edged away together, to a little distance, where they stood muttering to each other, and so seemingly struck stupid that they never thought of hastening for assistance till she cried in a voice that startled them like the clang of a bell:

"Go for help, or I will say you tried to shoot, and you to stab him!"

And as they slunk away before her pointed finger, she herself uttered a series of piercing cries that rung through the glades and thickets far and wide; then, suddenly desisting, she bent over her father, gazing wildly at that frightful wound in his neck, at the livid gashes in the white skin, and the few drops of dark, gelid-looking gore which trickled reluctantly from them; and then, though the beads of sweat oozed out on her dead-white face, and her eyes glared in her head with horror and disgust, she stooped her velvet sweet mouth to the hideous wound, and began to suck it.

And thus she was employed when Geoffrey Kilmyre came crashing through the underwood, calling loudly:

"Who is in trouble? Where are you?"

And seeing the strange tableau, he came to a dead stand over it, gazing in unutterable amazement, as if he could never gaze his fill.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PRISON IN THE FEN.

SHE suddenly looked up and knew him. "The worst has happened him," she said, in a hoarse, changed voice. "Oh, sir, why did you leave him for a moment?"

"Do not reproach me, you of all the world," answered he, impetuously, as he threw himself on his

knees on the other side of the body and ran his hands deftly under the bloody shirt-bosom of his uncle, to find the hidden wounds which made all these stains. "Foul lies were told him about the innocent and I went to find the victim and to prove her innocence."

"I know all that," said Monica, whose lips had gone back to their dread task while he spoke, and who looked up at him to reply with eyes shining maniacally; "but what mattered my good name beside his life? Oh, Geoffrey! Geoffrey!" she burst out wildly, sitting up and wringing her hands, "it's all over for him, I fear—I fear—oh, Geoffrey!" and her horror and anguish overcame her quite for the moment.

"Hush! Hush! Poor little girl! Sweet, kind little soul!"

The young man comforted her mechanically, for he had torn apart the snowy linen and was examining with shocked distress a formidable knife-gash in the fleshy part of his uncle's fore-shoulder, and trying in vain to gripe the gaping edges of the wound together that the blood might not flow so drenchingly. "This is dreadful for you to see, is it not, poor child? Yet, quick, help me here; you are as brave as you are good; not another woman among them would dare look on at this sight. Your handkerchief—tear it in strips. Stay—hold this for me—so—the lips of the wound close, while I get some water to stanch the blood, from the runlet yonder." And he ran, Monica obediently gripping the red raw gash with her shaking fingers, and bending again her foam-flecked mouth to the dog-bite, which now looked pale and bluish, and bled no longer, while the heart-sickening flavor of the virus she had sucked from it sent throes of revulsion through her. Presently, Geoffrey was back, pouring the water out of his felt hat upon the cut, in hopes that the icy cold would stay the flow of blood; then he noticed the girl's strange employment.

"What is this?" cried he, stopping short with sudden panic; then he saw the dead hound, and a great cry burst from him—"Explain, Miss Rivers—what has happened?" he faltered.

"They set a mad-dog upon him, Gavaine goading it till it bit him—here—"

The words were cut off in the midst, for a fierce hand clutched her, twisted her off her knees, and thrust her violently aside; and Rufus Marshall's demoniac eyes glared close into hers, while he hissed through clinched teeth and white, quivering lips:

"Ye witch, ye Jezebel, who in the fiend's name are you, that knows so much? Take care what you babble, or I swear I'll—I'll—take you care—"

He sputtered with unutterable fury and menace, and then he thrust her yet further aside, and she found herself in the gripe of two long, wrinkled, yellow claws, and a terrible, gaunt, wicked, foreign face leering close into hers; and somehow her heart sunk on the instant like lead, her blood froze, and she could neither resist nor scream out her terror, but was hurried away deeper into the woods, half-dragged and half-carried by the lithe, bony, gripping arms of the unknown man. She had a vague consciousness of many people clustering about her father, and of loud cries and confused voices and actions; also of the deep, stern voice of Geoffrey rising above the din, and a sudden dead silence following, broken by the high, thin, furious tones of Rufus Marshall and the coarse bullying ones of Gavaine; then she turned her dazed and swimming eyes up to see who he was who hurried her away with such brutal violence; and seeing a pair of gleaming, hollow black eyes peering back at her, a large, pale, lipless mouth, turned down, at the corners, skin harsh and yellow as ancient parchment, and withered into multitudinous, grim wrinkles about the bony brow and flabby eyelids; a nose long, crooked, and poking horribly toward the sharp and pointed chin, with its one long, glossy, goat-like lock of dyed hair worn *a la imperial*, and the whole ugly mask surmounted by a grotesque faded black-velvet skull-cap—a recollection of the poisoner, Vulpino, burst upon her quailing senses, and so completely overcame her that she sunk at his ugly splay feet, unconscious.

Alas, poor soul, she only awoke from that trance of horror to find herself caged; helpless to guard her father or rescue herself from the unknown dangers which beset her.

She was lying, still wearing Miss Montacute's riding-habit, upon a bed in a low-ceiled, whitewashed room; by the sand on the floor, and the unpainted woodwork, the tiny windows and the white deal-chairs, as well as the blue, rough homespun coverlet on the chintz curtained bed, and the monstrous stucco cat and dog on the wooden shelf over the open fire-place, she perceived that she had been conveyed to some humble cottage, and left to recover herself as she might, unassisted.

For a time she could only look about her with a faint, half-dazed sense of fear and weakness; the terrible scene through which she had passed seemed to have given her a nervous shock which both stunned her faculties and drained the strength out of her vigorous young frame; the humble features of her surroundings were swimming vaguely before her heavy eyes, and the very sky, which she could catch one grudging glimpse of through a crack at the side of the dingy cotton shade which was drawn down over the window at her side, seemed strangely unfamiliar in its deep amethystine hue, for it was brilliant sunny blue when she had last seen it, and it could not possibly, she thought, be evening yet.

Presently, having collected her thoughts, and recalled the last act of the awful drama of the dog, with the curtain falling on the senseless body of her father, surrounded by his bewildered guests, and Geoffrey Kilmyre denouncing the Marshall brothers upon her accusation, they fiercely defending themselves, and she being dragged away by the uncanny foreigner who could be none but Vulpino, the Italian poisoner, she raised herself, not without a strange

racking in all her bones, upon her elbow, and resting her giddy head against the worm-eaten board at the head of her bed, looked anxiously around her chamber.

A shabby little spindle-legged table stood beside her, and upon it she perceived some empty dishes of coarse blue-willow pattern, such as are used in the cottages of the very poor; a vial or two holding the dark remains of some strong-smelling medicine, and—strange accompaniment to these—a short, stumpy clay pipe, filled with coal-black ashes.

She sat up still further, peering with loudly-beating heart narrowly around for some human presence, and listening with bated breath for some sound, but she was entirely alone, and the only sound she heard was the loud, slow ticking of a clock outside her door; not another breath whispered to assure her that life was near.

Feeling strangely apathetic, and as if, having scaled the topmost heights of personal terror, she could never fear again, she soon dragged herself out of bed, and crawled, on trembling limbs and with feeble hands holding on to chairs and table by the way, to the near window; she rolled up the cotton shade, which was unfurnished with roller or cord, and looked out.

The scene was entirely new to her; in all her rambles about Dornoch, (and she had pretty well investigated that locality within ten miles of the hamlet, on every side,) she had never seen a landscape of this character.

A waste of flat barren seemed to spread its dark turf as far as the eye could reach on every side, unbroken save by waving wildernesses of ferns growing rank, and tall, and black, lifeless pools between, a sheeted silvery mist rising like ghostly smoke from the unwholesome fen-lands, and stealing about the cottage with a dank, death odor, that penetrated through the chinks of the ill-fitting sash and mingled with the thick, medicinal, ether-like atmosphere of the room. A high stone wall, in tolerable repair, and carefully garnished with broken glass on the wedge-shaped top, ran round the house as far as she could see, its top reaching almost to a level with the window-sill at which she stood, and in the ten-foot space of rough straggling grass between its base and the house wall, she could see, in spite of the dark shadows which filled the inclosure, a something black and serpentine, trailing its sinuous way out and in on the ground, and disappearing round the near corner. She knew it for a ponderous chain; it was neither rusty nor the paint wore off, and the grass was scarcely trodden upon which it straggled; it gave her a cold thrill of vague fear, although she guessed it must be only a watch-dog's chain, and that the kennel must be round the corner.

Having made all these discoveries, Monica next examined her prison. She tried to raise either of the two small fly-blown window-sashes, but found them rudely yet securely nailed down; no patent lock or catch was there that clever fingers might pick, but strong uncompromising spikes, driven home to the very heads by some brutal fist, and not to be drawn except by force as great, aided by the appropriate tools; the door, a rudely fashioned primitive affair of tough oak, was locked, and the key left sticking in it outside, and obstructing her view of the passage beyond; her scrutiny of the walls revealed nothing but solid lath and plaster unbroken by panel or secret door; the ceiling sloped like that of any cottage attic, the eaves cutting aslant the head room of an otherwise spacious enough apartment.

She found no closet, no press-room, nothing available for concealment or escape out of those four inexorable walls; the bed she discovered to be clamped down to the floor by a curious arrangement of iron braces and stout screws, and when she had swept away the thick white sand which almost obliterated all the cracks between the boards, she found to her amazement, and unutterable dismay, that the square upon which the bed stood was an independent piece of boarding, raised a quarter of an inch higher than the rest of the floor; and whether the main floor ran under this sinister looking platform or not, she could not see; but with a dread shiver running through all her bones she whispered to herself, "What stories I have read of beds being lowered into horrible pits, and sleepers being cast out of them to appear no more above the face of the earth! And the mechanism of the trap was always like this!"

Stripping back the faded and musty clintz hangings of the bed, she examined the tall posts as closely as she could in the waning light, but all looked innocent enough to outward eyes, and whether any machinery was concealed in these sturdy columns she could not discover. But she did discover, with unutterable loathing and fear, a tiny crystal stopper, as of the very smallest of vials, which smelled of chloroform sickeningly, and which had evidently been dropped into the hollow made by her shoulders as she lay on the outside of the coverlet, and, rolling under the pillow, had been lost by those who had been using the horrid drug upon her.

Next, she examined the vials on the table; but she could not recognize these drugs; the empty basin had contained warm milk, she saw by the boiled scum, and the porringer, beef-tea and port wine.

She sat on the edge of the bed trembling and flushed, her wonder and terror too big for the delicate frame and keen imagination to bear without anguish both of mind and body.

How long had she been cooped up here?

Had they been keeping her unconscious with ether and chloroform, and feeding her with liquids for a day, or a week?

Who was her jailer?

And—most harrowing thought of all—what was happening to her father?

"Oh, why was I not brave enough to keep my senses about me, and to cling to him, whatever they said or did?" she moaned, wringing her hands, and

discovering in the action how unfamiliar they were to her own touch, in their slenderness and thinness.

"Good God!" she gasped, pushing up the cloth sleeve of Miss Montacute's habit, which had fitted close as a French glove on her arm the day she drew it on, and which now hung loose upon her attenuated and softened flesh, "the Italian poisoner has been trying his arts upon me. I have been kept unconscious with opiates long enough for my body to lose flesh and my strength to ooze away, and in that time what may not have befallen my poor father? It cannot be Chance that has aroused me at last; they have ceased to drug me, and let me wake to consciousness again, why? Because all is over, and they need fear me no longer? Oh, God! spare him—spare him!" she cried, falling on her knees in anguished supplication.

The last gleam of day faded out of the sky, and Monica knelt in the eerie darkness, sometimes weeping, sometimes praying, but oftenest unconsciously straining her ears to catch the first faintest sound of human life, her heart beating thick and fast whenever the wind moaned over the drear waste, rattling the shrunken sashes, and unutterable coldness and desolation stealing over her when nothing broke the dead stillness that proved her safe from the intrusion she both feared and longed for.

She had ample time to harden herself to these miserable alternations of feeling; hour by hour was ticked out loudly and slowly by the invisible clock at the landing outside her door, which, by some refinement of cruelty, had been tampered with so that it did not strike the time, probably lest it should awake her prematurely. When cold and hunger proved to her that the night was waning without bringing her any visitor whatever, she crept away from the sinister-looking square upon which the bed was screwed, and arranging the bed-clothes upon three chairs, lay down again and tried to lose consciousness in slumber; but she had slept too long already, and now her brain whirled in agonizing sentence, refusing to cease for a single moment its keen and dazzling reasonings and realizations; so that she was obliged at length to spring to her feet, and pacing to and fro in the stifling darkness, to wait the dawn in the full anguished consciousness of her situation.

Once or twice during the course of the night she heard beneath her windows the heavy soft fall of feet trotting over deep grass, and a muffled snort and inarticulate yawning sounds. It was her invisible guardian, the watch-dog, stretching his legs; and as she heard no clink of the chain, she guessed that he was loose.

Alas! nothing could have more cruelly indicated the security of her prison and the inhuman brutality of her jailers. They must be fiends indeed who could ruthlessly leave a young girl alone in the depth of this waste, with a ferocious blood-hound (most probably) ready to tear her in pieces should she succeed in escaping from the cottage.

The night passed at last—at last!

So weary was she of the hideous vigil, that when the first beams of dawn reddened the white walls of her prison, she ran to the window, and stretched out her arms to the flushing portals of day in weeping adoration; and waited for God to be kind—to be merciful, and let her rejoin her father ere night fell again.

And then, as hour by hour crept on, all through as fair a spring day as England could ever hope to see; as dawn merged into the broad daylight, daylight warmed into noon—noon lengthened into the crystalline afternoon—evening—dusk—and then came light again, cold, dark and desolate—ah, what terrific alternations of doubt and despair rent her soul! How she trusted in God, waited patiently, chided herself for her unbelief, and called on the Omnipotent to grant her more faith—chilled into wild conviction of treachery and death—raved madly against the unnatural monsters into whose hands she and her poor father had fallen—shrieked (in accents shrill and piercing enough to set the bloodhound racing and howling in frantic excitement round and round the house) against God's ruthless cruelty—against man's demoniac inhumanity—against the unprecedented malignancy which had penned her here! Then how she lay in semi-lethargy, staring with blood-filled eyes for long hours at nothing; picturing the ghastly paroxysms of her father as he died of hydrophobia, and of herself lying in this dusty hovel dying of starvation, all her bones sticking through her bleached and glistening skin! And sometimes—strange thought at such a time surely—of Geoffrey Kilmyre's musical voice, shaken with grief and tenderness as he named her, "*brave as she was good,*" and "*poor little girl! sweet, kind little soul!*"

When midnight came—a cold, rainy midnight, without a star in the sky, or one gleam of the shrouded moon—crouching by the window, from which she had, in her frenzy, dashed out several panes, that she might at least breathe the air of heaven, she heard the stealthy fall of a horse's hoofs on the springy turf; presently the scroop of rusty hinges as some gateway creaked open; the bellowing barks of recognition and welcome of the hound, and the sound of his clumsy jumpings and gambolings; some one was in the narrow court beneath her windows, sitting quite still on a tall white horse, and the faint outline of his upturned face faintly visible in the gloom.

Her jailer had come at last, either to dispatch or succor her.

For a moment a wild thanksgiving rose in her soul. Anything rather than be left to perish alone! But, this over, she could not but quail and freeze with a nameless dread, as she gradually recognized through the gloom the sinister form and face of Vulpino the poisoner.

What mercy was it likely he would show her, the professional murderer, the monster in human shape, who had sent many a helpless soul into eternity for

gold, and who had made it his boast that he was "*always successful,*" and "*never detected!*"

So, instead of calling him wildly to come and let her out, or at least to tell her about her father, or mercifully to throw her the smallest, stalest crust, to ease the excruciating cravings of her famished stomach, she cowered back from the sash, and waited in breathless apprehension for him to enter and come to her room.

She heard him dismount from his horse so softly as scarce to jingle the stirrups; then a sound of snuffing and capering among the grass, the watch-dog welcoming him joyfully; then he seemed to be patting the dog's brawny body, and to be muttering some guttural foreign endearments; then a noise of snapping jaws and snarling.

He was feeding the dog; and at that portion of the ceremonies the famished captive crept back to the broken window, and peered wistfully down, almost ready to implore her captor for one mouthful, yet shrunk back out of sight again when the ill-omened bony visage turned warily upward, and the ugly Italian listened for her movements; then she heard the mingled sounds of his and his horse's steps passing round the cottage—to the door, she hoped and also feared; and then, while she was gathering all the pride and courage of her still dauntless soul to confront the villain worthily of her breed and his deserts, once more came the scroop of rusty hinges, the clang of a gate, the stealthy fall of horse's feet over springy heath—Vulpino was gone!

As this terrible fact broke upon the starving creature, a wild, thrilling gush of anguish poured from her gasping heart, and the rider set off at a mad gallop to escape that fearful cry.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FIEND AT THE COUCH.

THE twenty-four hours which we have described indicate the history of forty-eight more; during which the hapless Monica was abandoned in the unknown wilderness.

Her sufferings, mental and physical, are beyond narration; they would only harrow the reader's heart for naught; suffice it to say that three days after her recovery from unconsciousness, she lay at dusk on the bare floor in that corner of the room which was furthest from the bed. She had never laid upon it since that night she had discovered the diabolical mystery connected with it. She had passed through all the various stages of slow starvation, the giddiness, the raving hunger, the sick torment, the unendurable gnawings of her vitals, the gradual consuming of all strength, and one by one of all her faculties; and now she lay in a stupor, her sharpened face turned up and her blackened, parched, and excoriated lips open, and gasping for breath, while her hollow eyes glared through the glazing of coming dissolution, sightless and senseless.

The watch-dog had been visited twice in that time, and fed, and Monica had called and entreated the Italian, receiving no reply, not even the turning of his eyes in her direction. She had long known that it was intended that she should never emerge alive from her lonely prison, and argued from this (as long as she had sense to reason, poor soul, or to think of anything outside of her own cruel pangs,) that her father's life was by this time taken, and that his murderers dared not now set her free, since she suspected their guilt.

Be sure she had not tamely succumbed to her premature fate; rich in personal courage, as well as possessing great natural ingenuity and resource, with boundless patience and industry, she had tried every device which the cleverest captive could imagine to escape from her captivity, but her enemies had foreseen everything, and had prepared for everything that was in her power to do, so that in whichever direction she bent her efforts, she found them frustrated. The framework of the windows being slight, and worm-eaten, she had been able to drive out one of the sashes, and she could have easily lowered herself to the grass beneath by the aid of the bedclothes, had not the horrible apparition of the blood-hound, crouching beneath, been ever before her, its blood-shot eyes watching her, its red jaws dripping in expectation, and its continual hoarse baying chilling her blood; in vain had she endeavored to propitiate the brute by kind words and coaxing gestures; famine had made him savage, and some diabolical art of the Italian had imprinted on his canine brain the indelible conviction that the captive was his worst enemy.

Then she had tried to stun him with the only heavy articles in the room, namely the great rusty andirons that stood in the empty fireplace; these the animal had dodged one after the other, successfully, in spite of the unhappy girl's hours of anxious watching for an opportunity, and breathless dexterity in seizing it when it came; and, seemingly quite aware of what she had tried to do, a spirit of vengeance tenfold more malignant than the first had taken possession of the dog, and he was content to crouch by the hour motionless under the shelter of the wall, his red orbs, which glittered with a metallic glare, fastened in horrible fixity upon her.

Rotten as the door was, the lock was new and sound, and no force that she could use, minus iron tools, availed to break it open; the chimney was too narrow to permit of her exit through it, even could she have climbed it as a man would have done; and lastly, the walls defied her soft hands to beat them down, and the floor resisted her every effort to tear up a plank or loosen a nail. Had she had any means of lighting a fire, she would have burned her way out, but her jailers had been far too cunning to leave her so much as one match, knife, spoon, or article possible to be converted into a tool which would serve her purpose.

And now all was over: her life was ebbing fast

away, the chill of death was on her; she suffered no more pain or fear, for she was mercifully wrapped in the stupor which comes before death from inanition. But on this, the evening of the third day came an event.

She never heard the stealthy fall of horse's hoofs approaching over the heath, nor the savage yell of delight uttered by the famished hound as he heard and recognized the coming of his feeder; not a thrill of joy or fear passed through her death-struck frame, though (the dog having been thrown his meal of raw flesh, as his howl of rapture and then wild-beast growlings and snarlings attested,) the cottage door was unlocked at last, and stealthy feet mounted the creaking narrow stairs, stopping often for a minute at a time; came nearer—nearer—paused outside her door, and in the dim little passage an ear was placed to the keyhole; but still poor Monica took no heed, for she was dying.

It was Vulpino, who, having satisfied himself that his victim either could not or would not give any sign, boldly unlocked and entered her prison. He saw her at once, and glanced from the still figure on the floor to the unoccupied bed in surprise, asking himself why she had chosen between them thus; then perceiving that she had brushed away the sand from the slightly raised edges of the square upon which the bedstead stood, he shrugged his shoulders in grim comprehension, smiling darkly, and his wicked eyes twinkling, as if in anticipation of some interesting episode; and then he stalked over to her, knelt, and saw that she breathed yet.

At first he merely made a goblin-like grimace of disapprobation, muttering in his own language:

"Bah! you might have spared me this disagreeable duty, Piccolina. My word! but you must have as many lives as a cat, not to have succumbed yet. *Ebbene!* to work, Giacomo Vulpino; and now for a pretty bit of surgery."

The low muttering tone in which he spoke seemed scarcely enough to rouse the slightest slumberer; but perhaps it sounded in the long-silent room with unnatural loudness, or perhaps her ebbing life made one more desperate effort to save itself, inspired by the human voice; at all events, Monica's dim eyes opened suddenly, and she lifted them slowly and painfully up to his, and gazed.

The Italian had taken from his pocket a case of medical instruments, and was in the act of selecting a tiny crystal tube, fine as a darning-needle, but seeing her eyes he stayed his hands and returned her look, an expression of intense wonder gradually overspreading his harsh and sinister features.

Monica had one incomparable beauty, her eyes.

Lit by health, happiness and love, they had haunted the dreams of many a beauty-lover; and even now, though they were sunken, dimmed, and encircled with inky circles, they shot their spell straight to the heart of the Italian, who was like all his nation a born devotee at Beauty's shrine, so that for the moment he forgot everything else in the rare pleasure of drinking in the loveliness thus unexpectedly revealed.

This retarded Monica's fate for full five minutes.

The paid assassin did not say a word or attempt to make her speak, he simply looked his fill, narrowly, critically, and with a series of strange smirks of perfect approval, as if he was gazing at a notable picture in a gallery; but at last he drew a long breath and muttered in his own tongue, which Monica had studied enough to gather the meaning of:

"By Santa Maria, 'tis a pity to extinguish such fires, and carry their charming memory forever, associated only with an ugly death. But I see—I see! I get a peep of your game, Fratelli Marshall: the signorina is a Derwent, whether she knows it or not! By the exquisite eyes here reproduced to perfection of Dame Ethelgiva Derwent, whose venerable portrait hangs in the picture-gallery of the Weald, this unknown Monica Rivers from across the Atlantic is a true Derwent, whose life stands between these hungry money-hunters and their prize, and therefore it is that she must die. Ah, well! 'tis no concern of mine; they pay me well, and I love to be paid well; so you must go, pretty lady, and lie till the day of doom in the mysterious vault to which yonder couch will softly bear you."

Once more turning to his instruments he lifted her arm delicately, between one bony finger and thumb, and traced upon its cold and shrunken surface one big blue vein, with the blunt end of the minute glass syringe, and when he had selected the spot he was looking for, he took from the case a little vial containing a white fluid, and unscrewing the top of the syringe, adroitly charged it with a drop or two and screwed it on again.

But Monica had been gradually regaining her consciousness as he knelt there, and not only had heard and translated all he said, but was now slowly and feebly fitting meaning to his words; slowly comprehending the accompanying actions.

As he lifted her arm once more, having previously mounted on his high sharp nose a pair of heavy gold-rimmed spectacles, she made a supreme effort to move her blue lips to speak.

He perceived the attempt, and, curiosity overcoming the professional unconcern with which he had been about to win his money, he relinquished her arm, laid down the deadly little weapon carefully, on the bare floor at his side, and deliberately producing a flask of spirits, wet her mouth with a few drops, and chafed her temples with his great clammy palms, until she felt a thrill of life pass through her veins.

Again she moved her poor pale lips, which had almost forgotten how to do anything but gasp and quiver in pain, but she was far too weak to utter a sound as yet, and could only look up piteously at the man whom she fully recognized as her appointed murderer.

With what unnatural apathy she told herself this!

But she had already suffered pangs worse than any death—nothing could frighten one so miserable.

The Italian patiently went on restoring her; he had long been soiled to the extremity of crime, and with impunity—that his conscience was stone dead—he never had had much—his heart—(always a small one)—obtruded no more on his chosen course; it was not remorse, and it was not pity which now stayed his hand from taking away this sweet young life for a paltry thousand pounds; it was simply that he would like to hear her version of the Derwent-Marshall affair, which, for all he knew, held far richer awards in its secrets than he had been promised.

At last she could speak, though she was so sadly reduced that the effort to articulate a few syllables seemed like the squeezing out of the last drops of her heart's blood, and sent the last arid tear of exhaustion rolling scantily down her skeleton cheek.

"I—know—you—" she panted, so faintly and huskily that Vulpino had to bend his disgusting great ear close to her mouth before he could distinguish the words; "I—heard—them—Vulpino—Mr. Derwent—poison—oh! Tell—is he dead?" The last three words she cried out together in a sudden throe of agonized suspense, while her shaking hands strove to clasp themselves and rise toward him in supplication; but the Italian never heeded the appeal, he was too intent on his plans.

"Ma pretta mees," said he, in his broken English, calling up a would-be benevolent smile to his hideous visage, "w'at you want of the reesh man Derwent-a?"

"Is—he—dead?" reiterated Monica, piteously.

"Dat I tell ven you tell me de oder-a, pretty mees!" said he, nodding his head grotesquely, and picking up the tiny tube for a plaything, to twist in his long, dirty-nailed claws.

"W'at you?—eh? queek, tell-a me."

Monica saw that it was only wicked curiosity that had restored her, and turned her poor face away in bitter disappointment.

"Know you dat I hold de leetle life in my hands?" grinned he, lightly tracing the selected vein on her bare arm with the sharp point of the syringe. "Now you answer-a me, pronto—pronto—or I—ah! and de leetle Riviera lie dead, essa stessa; o—he! an'den I weep-a!" and he made a playful little prod at her arm with the point of the syringe, and pretended to wipe his eyes.

Monica had resigned herself to die some twelve hours since, and had not hoped for deliverance since, but she now felt a sudden enraged reluctance to meet death at these vile hands.

She found strength enough yet to drag herself to her knees, and to plead for her young life in a burst of agonizing prayer.

"Oh, save me!" she moaned. "What have I done to you—to any one, that I should be murdered?"

"You see thees delicata leetle machina?" he retorted, putting it close to her eyes and sinking his voice to hoarse menace, while his fiendish glare rested upon her derisively; "see thees nice-a stringa, veesh is full-a of a virus deadly as the poison of de serpent vat you call-a 'Dame Blanche,' small—deadly beyond all others? Thees sharp end, look—copetta—I pierce de nice-a pretty flesh of young mees veeth it, in de vein, here, gardare? Just preck—no more-a! Bote ven I press on dees-a extremita—aha! I shoot into de vein dat wheesh lays Piccolina Riviera at my feet una corpa morta—a corpse—in one—t'ree minute; eh?"

Monica perfectly followed this horrid explanation, and sunk down again with a low shuddering moan, her hands still piteously supplicating for mercy, and the great tears, which she had supposed all shed long ago, coursing once more down her convulsed face. He wanted her to gratify his wicked curiosity regarding her connection with her father, and she knew there was no use in her complying, even had she possessed the strength to utter the explanations, for she knew that she must die, and that he had been appointed to assassinate her.

"Only say that my—that Mr. Derwent still lives," she implored, with a last expiring effort, crawling to him and clasping his knees; "and then dispatch me quickly," she cried out, in thrilling tones.

"Ha! misera! scelerata! leetle scamp-a!" he hissed, angrily, reading her determination not to betray anything she knew, and then he stood silent, glooming darkly down at her, as he cast about in his crafty mind whether he could possibly wring the withheld information out of her, or whether he had after all missed anything of importance; but presently he made up his mind that she was too far gone now for him to maneuver, and that he might as well proceed with the business in hand while he felt angry with her, as he could then shift the blame of the deed upon her own head.

"Verra vell, foolish sciocca—idiot; I vood-a spared-a you, per il Grand Iddi; bote—mind-a—you vood not spik, so—" He suddenly bent down and snatched her arm, she uttering an involuntary cry of despair, a cry that was little more than a whisper, so faint and feeble was it, yet it was heard by one who long had overlooked the interview.

Just as the Italian poisoner brought the sharp point of the death-charged tube to the artery in the satin inside of Monica's arm, she faintly struggling, and averting her poor blinded eyes that she might not see her murder, a stalwart form darted through the open doorway, a hand of iron seized Vulpino's collar, and while he was sent reeling in one direction, Monica found herself caught up to a broad breast, and a voice which she had dreamed she heard many times speaking most sweetly through her delirium, said now in the same full-hearted tones:

"Dear little girl! Poor little girl! Have I found you at last?"

And she, raising her half-senseless eyes, with a

smile of ineffable joy and peace, beheld the pale, tender face of Geoffrey Kilmyre close to hers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOLDED IN TENDER ARMS.

He seemed to be almost beside himself as he held the terribly altered girl in his arms; he forgot everything but her, and the sufferings she had gone through, and the anxiety he had endured in his long, feverish search for her, and the thoughts he had had about her; and she was not so far gone as to be unconscious that he was straining her against his loudly-beating heart, and showering kisses upon her poor, sharpened face, and whispering sweetest, warmest words of pity and love to her; and, somehow, she did not think of shrinking from him, nor of feeling astonishment, or embarrassment, or anything but rest and safety—oh, such dear, delicious rest, and such peaceful, satisfied safety.

For indeed they had thought so much about each other, these two impulsive, generous, honest hearts, that it was the most natural thing in the world that they should meet just so, without one shadow between.

But, presently, things faded from poor Monica's eyes, and she felt his dear hands and kisses no longer; she sunk into the stupor from which the assassin had waked her.

Geoffrey stood with the limp and lifeless body in his arms, gazing at it wildly.

He thought Monica was dead.

He could not breathe, he grew blind, he reeled giddily.

He believed that he had come too late, after all, and that this, the sweetest woman in the whole world, would never lift her brave, proud eyes in gentle kindness to his again.

How long did he stand there holding her thus? He took no note of time; he was in a trance.

But Vulpino, the wretch who had done this foul deed, moved in his corner where he lay in a distorted heap, just as he had fallen. He was recovering his senses.

Geoffrey started, and looked round at him with bloodshot eyes.

A fearful smile crossed his bitten and bleeding lips. He carried his burden to the bed, and softly laid it down; he kissed each sweet eyelid down over the dark, dim eyes; he straightened the beautiful limbs with reverent hand, and placed the two little hands upon the still bosom; then he bent to lay his death-pale cheek against hers, his caressing hand stroking (oh, so tenderly—so tenderly!) her long, unbound black hair; and a groan tore its way from his very soul.

"Oh, my poor darling!" he muttered, chokingly—"my little, brave, good darling, I came too late to save you, but, dear, not too late to avenge you—not too late for that! And Heaven, I know, will not hold me guilty, though you, sweet, if you were alive, would plead for your murderer, so gentle and so kind you were!"

He heard another movement in the corner, and he strode across the room in time to seize the throat of the Italian, who was in the act of stealthily gliding toward the door.

"Would you like to hear the programme of the next few minutes, murderer?" said he, through his gritting teeth, while he forced the trembling wretch to meet his flaming eyes.

Vulpino burst into a torrent of Italian, as well as he could articulate it with those iron fingers gripping his gullet; but Geoffrey was too excited to comprehend him, although, in his calmer moments, he was not a bad speaker of the language; and he put a summary stop to the tide of protestations and explanations by giving him a shake that almost dislocated his neck.

"Come down-stairs out of the sacred presence of your victim," he ground out, suiting his actions to his words, and forcing the Italian before him. "Come outside and bear your punishment, and after it your execution—which two duties I take upon myself with joy—with joy, hound, do you hear?" giving him another fierce shake that turned the strangling wretch black in the face, "and I only wish we were back in the middle ages, when you would have been thrown into a caldron of boiling oil, or strung up by the hair for the rooks to peck at. Oh, my God! to think that all your miserable carcass could suffer if all the tortures of the Inquisition were at my command, could not bring to life again that lovely, sweet girl! How could you—how could you do it, man?"

And for a moment his anguish of grief overtopped the vengeful fury that was lashing him on to ruin by taking upon himself the miserable Vulpino's punishment; and Vulpino took advantage of the momentary loosening of his hold to wrench himself free with one sudden jerk and dart; but ere he had reached the door, deeply socketed in the wall which surrounded the cottage, Geoffrey's pistol covered him, and he stopped, perforce, his teeth chattering and his knees doubling up under him.

Since he could not stand, he made the best of necessity—he knelt, clasped his great bony hands, and gathered enough English to make his defense.

"It ees a mistake-a, Grand Iddi! Vood you keel-a me, veethout to hear von explain? Ze donna, see ees note yet dead, no, not at all—see leevs! Come back-a, oond see. Corpo di Dio! I notting do to hare. No, I deed note ze injection of ze poison; no, I not begun, ven-a you come; see leevs, I tell-a you; veramente, oond you keel-a me, destroy you self, all for notseeng, niente! bah!"

Geoffrey had only let him run on so long because he was striding—still keeping his pistol leveled at the wretch's heart—to pick up his riding-whip, which lay on the ground beside the horse he had ridden. Having now secured it, he strode quickly back to the culprit, and without another word brought

down the good new thong across his parchment face with an accuracy of aim and a nervous vigor that left a mark like a narrow red ribbon straight from the right bony temple down to the left side of the long poking chin, and wrung a yell of pain and rage from the astonished sufferer.

Before he could jump to his feet, nimble as his motions now were, another cut had crossed its predecessor, slanting exactly the opposite way, so that the hideous visage was now marked with a blood-red X, from the clean lines of which little round drops of the same color were starting, to trickle in tiny rivulets down among the wrinkles; and then Vulpino was ordered to keep his knees, if he would not have a bullet through his brain without further parley, and reminded that he had better occupy his mind in saying his prayers while his penance was progressing, as its duration was all the time he would have on this earth, which henceforth would furnish nothing but a grave for a wretch such as he.

And then the blows rained down on his quivering body, each lash stinging like a flame, and the doomed man dared scarcely writhe in his tortures, but glared at the death-dealing weapon which glittered in his executioner's left hand, while the right was employed with his flagellation. However, desperation soon came to Vulpino's aid, and in spite of his physical sufferings, he contrived at last to make a coherent appeal, with such an air of sincerity that Geoffrey deigned to listen, although he did not pause in his labor a moment for that.

"Eef you veel-a let me to esplain," whined the Italian as well as he could with his agonies making his teeth jerk into his tongue, "I veel-a say moche dat you veel be best-a to know about ze Fratelli Marshall; I veel-a show you how to save ze old signor; as for ze mees, see is only faint wis ze famine, I no toche her as yet. See, here ees ze *siringa*, wis ze *veleno*, vat ees *poison*, *tutta* in it—*vedere*, behold!" And he held up the tiny tube, through the crystal of which Geoffrey could see the fluid glittering, quite full. "Oond eef you take away ze life-a, who veel show to save ze signore? None can do dat bote ze *avvelenator*—ze professed poisoner, *gardare*."

When Geoffrey was out of breath, he snapped his whip in two, and tossed it at his well-flogged enemy; and he did not at once blow his brains out as he had promised to do; perhaps he had worked off some of his fury, and his better nature was coming to the surface again—perhaps the villain's remonstrances had reminded him of the possibility of ameliorating the case, and of the fatal indiscretion of gratifying his vengeance without due investigation of facts; at all events he folded his arms, and stood looking contemplatively down at the writhing form and craven face of the Italian, listening to the torrent of entreaties, confessions, promises and bewailings which he poured out so volubly, until a faint sound from above sent his startled eyes up to the window overhead, and he saw the blessed vision of Monica's white face and large, dark eyes, and her little weak hand tapping at the pane.

So then he uttered as a shout and was running like the wind for the house, but stopped at the door with a grunt of grim resolution; wheeled and went back to his trembling victim, whose swarthy face had lit up with a relief and joy almost equal to his own.

"Get up," said Geoffrey.

Vulpino obeyed with abject docility.

"March!" said Geoffrey, waving his hand toward the other side of the cottage.

And Vulpino strode with alacrity round the corner, and came in sight of the dog's kennel, and of the dog's carcass lying across its threshold with its throat cut.

"Take the chain off your sleuth-hound, demon," Geoffrey commanded; "it is well for you that your villainous scrag neck has not made the like acquaintance with my hunting-knife as your dog's. A fine sentinel to set over a tender helpless woman, isn't it? Oh, you scoundrel! if you don't smart for this yet."

To the tune of these remarks Vulpino unlocked the massive chain with which he had secured his bloodhound while he went up-stairs—in his absence he always had left him loose, to scour around the house, so that his prisoner dared not issue from any window, even had she succeeded in escaping from the room in which she was locked.

Geoffrey took the end of the chain from him, and ordered him to hold up his hands; which, when he obeyed, were securely bound together, after which Geoffrey proceeded to bind his ankles after the same pattern; disposing of the balance of the chain by passing it several times round his waist; so that, the job finished, Vulpino found himself trussed up firmly as a hare, and weighted to boot with no less than a hundred pounds of rusty iron.

Thus garnished he was fain to sink upon the grass beside the carcass of his slaughtered accomplice, the hound: while Geoffrey walked off cheerfully and bounded up-stairs to feed his glad eyes and exulting heart on the dear and despaired-of sight of Monica alive and conscious, and even able to give him a pale, tremulous little smile as he came toward her, and to pierce his soul with the solemn fervor of her grateful eyes.

Joy at the prospect of deliverance, more especially at his hands, added to the few drops of brandy which the poisoner had poured down her throat in the hope of hearing from her some important secret before she died, had given her a fleeting strength so that, recovering consciousness, and finding herself once more alone, she feared that all she had lately seen had been only one of her delirious visions, and had dragged herself painfully inch by inch to the window, to see whether any one was below.

But now she had an attendant ready to do anything or everything for her; oh, such a tender, patient, loving, beaming nurse! How carefully he fed the famished creature, a crumb at a time, with

tinest sips of sparkling water just flavored with wine, between, so wise and prudent that although it cut him to the heart to refuse her anything, he would not let her have a crumb too many a moment too soon, lest she might die yet, poor suffering darling, for even the bulk of an egg of the delicate wine-biscuits, which he had providentially chanced to have in his pocket, would have been a surfeit for her shrunken and debilitated stomach, which had eaten on itself only for three excruciating days.

And when she drooped against him, her grateful eyes closing in spite of her, with the weakness of one out of a long fever, how gently he laid her on the bed—how patiently he sat by her; then when she awoke anon, hungrier than ever, how joyously he went through the whole critical process again!

So that, in about four hours, she was strong enough to let him carry her down-stairs in his arms, and to lie on his bosom, tied to him by his own soft fleecy muffler, on his gallant horse's back; and so, walking as gently as possible, they made the journey from that border county into the next back to Dornoch-Weald; arriving there at eight o'clock of the evening, after dark.

"And now—Mr. Derwent!" muttered Monica, feverishly, when her speech had come back to her.

"Dear, two days ago he was yet alive," said Geoffrey, turning paler; "but I was got out of the Weald by a despicable stratagem and have ever since been searching for you. Their chance whisperers warned me of your danger."

"Oh, not me—tell about him!" moaned the girl. Geoffrey could not but gaze perplexedly at her, for how was he to account for her devotion toward one who had treated her so cruelly.

"I have every hope of his safety, yet," said he, stoutly; "the eyes of the county are upon the Weald; and even hydrophobia must run its course. Cheer up, sweet Monica; I think we shall be able to save him yet, you and I."

Then he told her where she was.

The conspirators had recognized in the stranger American at first only an accidental meddler in their affairs; but since then their eyes had been opened to the electrifying truth that she was Mr. Derwent's lawful and only child; a mere whisper in Mr. Derwent's ear was the only thing wanted to set him promptly revoking that unnatural will, the unjust terms of which the two brothers knew too well; and naming the interloper as his heiress, to the exclusion of every other candidate. Her doom, up to that revelation, having hung in the balance, for circumstantial evidence had eventually pointed her out as the owner of the scrap of lace found by Godiva in the forest, that day of the double conferences, it needed but this culminating stroke of fate, revealing her relationship to Derwent, to seal it. That was why they had at first given her food and kept her in blessed unconsciousness of her sufferings, afterward abandoning her to starvation.

The delicate young creature whom Geoffrey had been wont to call his "lily-maid"—Godiva Montacute, had been the most inexorable of the trio, in passing the death-sentence upon Monica. The innocent prattle of good Mrs. Aberfeld revealing Master Geoffrey's kindness to the "bonny stranger lassie," added to the long, fierce scrutiny the yellow-haired adventuress gave her dark-haired *spirituelle* rival, that first day of Vulpino's custody of her in one of the uninhabited rooms of the Weald, had hardened Godiva's heart against her, until it seemed as if she could not rest quietly until Vulpino could say, "The heiress is dead." Geoffrey, who had presumed to overlook her almost proffered love, had been enthusiastic in his praises of her; the cruelly cold Derwent, whom she had one day wooed with half-mad candor, would hold this stranger in his arms, thanking God she was purer and better than she!

"Take her to Feltrie," spake the cold, lowering beauty; "it is sufficiently removed from us here to render it impossible for her to escape hither and spoil our schemes. She has only to pour her fatal revelations into her father's ear, and we are ruined. Feltrie is even more secluded than Dornoch, as there is no hamlet there, nor a railway within thirty miles; it stands in the very fastnesses of Scottish mountains; and the dialect of the people will be a foreign language to an American. Also, there chances to stand on the estate, three or four miles distant from the castle, a curious little hunting-lodge, built a hundred years ago by one of our ancestors to accommodate his sporting friends, and afterward diverted to the grim duty of imprisoning a certain suspected Lady Derwent, said to be selling the honor of her house to foreign invaders, and too popular among the common people to be openly punished. Once, as a child, Mr. Derwent took me through the old shooting-box; it was a prosaic enough looking cottage, until I saw the high stone wall that surrounded it; there were bars across the miserable little windows; and in one up-stairs room an infernal machine for secret murder, and the very trap, arranged under the great ghostly bed to slide away in the dead of night and drop the sleeper into a well forty feet deep."

And that was where Vulpino had spirited his drugged and unconscious captive the night after that fateful hunt, and where Geoffrey had at last traced him as he went to feed his grim canine sentinel, which, like himself, was more a beast of prey than a domesticated animal.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOYAL HEARTS.

ABOUT half a mile from the great house, and buried in the deepest of the Dornoch forests, stood a gamekeeper's hut, a trim, flower-starred oasis in the tangled wild. In past days, Geoffrey Kilmyre had been a well-beloved visitor to its old bachelor occupant, honest Toby Hurlbutt, and now that the old fellow had lately brought home the prettiest girl in the village, to brighten his fireside and bloom among

his flowers, herself the sweetest blossom there, it was the very place of places to which he thought he could safely and most welcomingly bear the rescued Monica, to be tenderly nursed by his warm-hearted Cicely, while he poured out the whole affair to Toby.

Toby Hurlbutt was a tall, dark, taciturn peasant, curiously accomplished in all that pertained to wood and game craft, but contentedly, nay haughtily ignorant of everything else.

The great folks might eat each other up about their sacks of gold and fine houses for all him. He did not understand the rights or wrongs of such cases. He "s'posed they knew what they was about, but for him, he'd enough ado, to 'tend to the dashed poachers and the game under his charge, wi' little Cicely, his woman, to do for him inside."

The master had never troubled himself to get under the crust of the silent old gamekeeper's reserve, so that there was no personal sympathy or comprehension between them, and the master's guests were "naught but a crowd o' bedizined, chattering zanies, who didn't know a pine from a fir, and would ride straight into the quagmires, if their horses hadn't more sense than them, and wouldn't go."

But Geoffrey was different.

From his very infancy Geoffrey had been up to everything in Toby's line; never so happy as when he rode his rough, thick-legged pony through the woods, with Toby by its bridle; eager to shoot with Toby's own sacred old gun, which, when he had surreptitiously succeeded in doing, kicked the tiny fellow off his pony's back, from which unexpected reverse he bounced up again without one whimper, although he was black and blue all over. Ah, yes! young "Maister Geoffrey" was a rare good hunter, and a venerating disciple of Toby's from his babyhood even until now, when he brought home to his trusted old Toby the strangest game he had ever bagged, and asked his advice what to do now. So, while Monica lay white and panting in the high four-post bed, the rose-chintz curtains drawn so as to shade her eyes from the candle-light, and Cicely close beside her, holding in her plump brown hand the cold, snow-white and utterly fleshless one of the poor sufferer; Geoffrey and his old chum, enveloped in the same cloud of tobacco-smoke, sat one on each side of the freshly-whitened hearth-stone, concocting a plan to rescue the Master of Dornoch from his fiendish relatives—to catch them red-handed so as to insure their punishment, and to reinstate the old peace and security at the Weald, with the old love and faith between uncle and nephew.

Next morning Monica craved so earnestly to hear how matters stood at the Weald, and to know what next was to be done, that her little hostess arrayed her in her own pink and white cambric dress, smoothed the rich black hair back from her snowy temples in a great classic knot low on her neck, and having helped the trembling form to the deep chintz bedroom chair with the high hassock under feet, thrown open the window to let the sweet scents of the flowers steal in on the sunny morning breeze, and made up the stately bed like a great white snow-drift, she then let the young master in.

The eager step, the outstretched hands, the brightness in his eyes, and the spontaneous smile like a ray of light, all told how gladly her rescuer came to her side, and how little needed were the earnest thanks she hastened to offer him for his great service; her face, too, pale and haggard though it was, lit up with an expression that seemed to bring back all its lost beauty, and thrilled the young man anew, tightening his clasp of her little frankly given hands, and making him bend over her with a yearning hunger in his heart, till his caressing breath stirred the tiny, tendril-like rings on her forehead.

And Cicely, looking on with wide blue eyes, smiled and blushed with sympathy, knowing all about this sort of thing, and crept to the kitchen, softly closing the door upon the pair; and then, running over to her own tall, grim, dark-faced lover-husband, threw her pretty self on his broad breast with a cooing little cry of pleasure, and whispered:

"Young Maister's fond o' t' poor, pretty lady, an' she iv him, an' oh, Toby, it's just beautiful to see 'em!"

And Toby, considering what a hard old fellow he was, and how difficult it was for him to express his private feelings in words, acquitted himself on this occasion to admiration, by simply giving his little lass a hearty hug, and leaving a good, well-relished kiss on her cherry mouth.

And then he lit his pipe, and smoked all sorts of kind and pleasant thoughts up the chimney, while his little wife tripped about her morning work, feeling as proud and important as if she and Toby were entirely responsible for the love-idyl that was happening so beautifully in there.

Meanwhile, Geoffrey having at last relinquished Monica's hands, but only to kneel on one knee on her footstool, with one arm half-encircling her, chair and all, she was asking questions and he was answering them animatedly; and the tragedy at the Weald was somehow losing half its horror, discussed by lips so manly, and the future was shaping itself more desirably every moment longer that they looked upon each other.

Geoffrey told her that Mr. Derwent had had his wounds dressed by Sir Maxwell Froberton, a baronet-physician, who had chanced to be with the hunt that day, but who had returned to London the next; he had cauterized the dog's bite and sewed up the knife-wounds. The latter he assured Mr. Derwent were only trifling flesh cuts, dangerous only from the quantity of blood they had shed, and his real danger lay in the possible effects of the bite.

Geoffrey had gone home with his uncle from the scene of the catastrophe, and had resolutely remained beside him until his enemies got rid of him by an impudent stratagem. All the guests of course left the Weald as soon as possible, not liking to intrude upon such terrible misfortune; then Miss

Montacute had daringly dismissed every soul of the old domestic force—in spite of their amazement and rebellious remonstrances—for some of them had been born in the house, and their parents before them; indeed, there were those whose ancestors had *always* served the house of Derwent, and who knew that the master would as soon think of tearing down the cherished antiquities of his castle as of sending them out into the world.

But Godiva was resolute, and won her point, backed by the two Marshalls, who were of course well known to be Mr. Derwent's favorites, and who had usurped the place of Geoffrey Kilmyre, they supposed, in the master's heart as well as in his will; backed by them, with their lying assurances that it was Mr. Derwent's own order, and that he meant to send for them again if ever he recovered from the fearful malady which threatened his life.

So the whole army were scattered to the four winds of heaven, ay, even to the good old lady, Mrs. Aberfeld, whose six feet of green sod was already picked out in the family burying-ground of the Derwents in Dornoch; and the Weald was left in possession of these three unloved, and bitterly suspected aliens.

To be sure, they had concocted a tolerably plausible excuse for their high-handed act; they gave out that if Mr. Derwent's symptoms eventually hinted at hydrophobia, they meant to take him to an eminent physician in Paris, by easy stages. There was something in that, and although Otto Derwent's servants could never bow the neck gracefully to the detested successors he had set over them, they at least felt that they had no power to stand up against them, and so perforce they went, each his separate way.

For the first few days after the accident, Geoffrey stuck like a leech to his uncle's bedside, resolved that no hand should minister to him in his helplessness save his own. But so rigidly were his movements watched that he could not catch a glimpse of one of these faithful old servitors, so that, much as he wanted the assistance of some loyal messenger to communicate with outside friends, he found no chance of communication with them. And although Geoffrey sat by his uncle's pillow, permitting no one but himself to attend him, after this notable departure the accomplices became more unguarded, distinctly giving him to understand that they would stick at nothing to oust him from that place, so that he dared not leave the sick-room for a moment, but sat there in a state of siege, wondering why none of the servants dared join him by stratagem, knowing nothing about their dismissal until he found it out by the deathlike silence in the house.

Having achieved this riddance of inconvenient honesty, their next move was to get rid of Geoffrey. Vulpino did this for them.

He slid into the room one midnight, when Geoffrey, overcome by his sleepless vigil, had succumbed to exhaustion, and leaned in deep sleep with his head on the same pillow with his uncle's, and his hand holding his, in the keen dread of treachery.

Geoffrey was soon disposed of. Caused to inhale the fumes of ether, he only opened his eyes for a moment when on the verge of falling over into unconsciousness, and saw the hideous Italian bending over him with wicked exultation, while he held the saturated sponge to his nostrils. Geoffrey knew perfectly well what had been done, and made a frantic effort to shake off the numbness, and to see what was being done to his uncle; but, all in vain; his half-blind glance at Mr. Derwent showed him fast asleep, probably under the influence of the ether also, and then he fell down senseless.

And when he came to himself he was lying alone in the woods, about half a mile from Dornoch-Weald.

He went at once to the village—it was dawn by this time—and roused the pastor, asking his advice.

This seemed the most natural and indeed inevitable thing to do; Mr. Grindon was the only person of any public influence or authority within a score of miles, Mr. Derwent being himself the justice of the district; and Geoffrey did not know how fiendishly he had been maligned to the reverend gentleman.

Well, the Rev. Mr. Grindon listened to the wild tale of the brothers Marshall's conspiracy with cold incredulity, and flatly refused to stir a step in the matter, unless Geoffrey could bring some "more trustworthy" witness to corroborate his statements.

In vain Geoffrey pleaded; the old man was resolute.

He had so long known Geoffrey Kilmyre only as a daring, reckless scapegrace, that he now did him the injustice of believing that he was only trying to injure his uncle's new favorites, in the hope of being reinstated himself again.

Do not blame the poor old man; his house had been left unto him desolate two years ago, indirectly through this young pleasure-seeker's conduct; how was he to guess at the deeper villainy of these two hypocrites, who pulled such reverential and devout faces whenever they met him, who attended his chapel with such exemplary regularity, and who sometimes dropped into the parsonage (at least Rufus did; in all cases of verbal hypocrisy he kept the clumsy Gavaine in the background) to talk charity, to fiddle over plans and specifications for new cottages, schools, and other such improvements, to be made in that millennial season when he should be the master of Dornoch?

Two years ago, Geoffrey, a wild enough young fellow then, although he had never put one stain upon his manliness and honor, and got credit for doing many a wild thing which he was incapable of—well, he had been home on one of his flying visits to his uncle. At that time there was in the clergyman's family a young and extremely pretty girl named Nellie Wyvern, governess to his two youngest children. His eldest was a young man of twenty-one or two, a dashing and rather dissipated captain in the

Guards, who would have far outstripped Geoffrey in mad pranks any day, though it was little that his father and mother suspected it.

Geoffrey, saw, and fell madly in love, as he then called it, with the little governess; and she, possessed of nothing except an exceedingly lovely little face and figure, with vanity corresponding, was well pleased to be made love to, especially by the young heir of the proud Dornoch estates.

Probably this affair would have drifted along to the usual end, leaving him disenchanted and palled, and shaking her off; and *her* wrecked ere she was well launched on the ocean of life, had not her lover been that rare thing, a gentleman of honor, to whom the meanest maiden in the land was sacred. He walked and talked with pretty Nellie, all under the rose, of course, for her sake as well as his own, he not resolving upon or indeed realizing anything except the hour's fascination.

Some busybody told Mr. Derwent, however; and uncle and nephew came to controversy on the subject.

Taxed with wronging a poor, unsophisticated little girl, Geoffrey hotly denied any such intention. His uncle coldly said that now the gossips had got hold of it, facts mattered little; the girl's name was gone. In bitter dismay, and generously penitent, at the mischief he had unwittingly wrought his darling little love, the fine fellow swore he would marry Nellie then, but he would never have her ruin laid at his door. Mr. Derwent's secret wound was here touched on the raw. He remembered his own mismatch; he burst into ungovernable fury, and dared his heir to marry a little nobody like Nellie Wyvern. Geoffrey, astounded and bitterly hurt at this unwonted violence, vowed he would please himself.

Then his uncle passionately threatened him with disinheritance, and that clinched the matter. Geoffrey strode straight off and asked Nellie to marry him. Enchanted, she consented. Then, in his proud truthfulness, he told her what he had lost for love of her. Nellie was stunned; she had no idea of marrying anybody who could not make her a lady. Still she had grace enough not to tell her generous lover that to his face. She pretended to cling to him, and they acted engaged long enough for Mr. Derwent to publicly close his doors against his nephew, and to write to the Marshall brothers (the one a silk-merchant, Rufus, and the other a stock-raiser) asking them to Dornoch. Geoffrey took rooms at the village inn, and hastened his marriage with Nellie, proudly resolving to make a thriving artist of himself, as his amateur attempts had won high praise from all who knew that the painter was next of kin to the Master of Dornoch. Nellie was at her wits' end how to get out of the engagement without exposing her meanness. In this dilemma young Captain Grindon, the clergyman's only son, found her when he came for his flying visit home. He was more to her taste than Geoffrey; there was nothing to awe her in Tom; Nellie fell in love, really, this time, with the flippant, flattering, easy captain; and showed it.

Tom Grindon then offered to rescue her from her distasteful marriage; offered to save her from honor, and bestow upon her the generous boon of dishonor.

And the soulless, ephemeral creature, scarce worthy of the name of woman, accepted the deliverance!

They eloped together; and the country-side rung with the shameful occurrence.

The good parson and his wife had been so proud of their son, so certain of his integrity and worth, that now they could not comprehend his fall; so that, when supposing of course that the young pair had gone to get married, Mr. Grindon rushed after them and discovered their hiding-place. The deeper shame in which he found his boy almost crushed him; and Tom, base at heart as Nellie herself, tried to excuse his guilt by insinuating that he had been tempted to it by Geoffrey, who wanted to get out of his entanglement with the girl, for the sake of his fortune.

And Mr. Grindon believed this, it was so natural, so plausible; and although it did not in the least excuse Tom, it ruined Geoffrey in the eyes of the stern old man; so that when he returned to Dornoch, humbled and heart-broken at Tom's impenitence, he took a bitter consolation in disclosing the full infamy of Geoffrey's stratagem to his uncle, resolved that he should never reap the benefit of it.

And to this day he loathed and abhorred Geoffrey Kilmyre, tracing to him the death of his wife, (who had not survived Tom's disgrace a month), and considering him capable of any wickedness.

And this was why he refused to credit anything such a character would say about the doings at Dornoch-Weald.

Geoffrey left the parsonage at his wits' end where to turn for counsel or assistance.

CHAPTER XX.

"WHEN THIEVES FALL OUT."

BESIDES, all this time he had felt an ever-increasing uneasiness about Monica; his last glimpse of her had been as she cried out in denunciation of the Marshalls over the insensible form of Mr. Derwent.

He had a half-consciousness of Vulpino's leading her away; but he could never be sure about that; Vulpino was a stranger to him at that time, and although he knew him too well now, from seeing his ill-omened face peering into Mr. Derwent's sick-room, he was not quite sure of the identity of the two.

But where could she be?

It seemed to Geoffrey now the best, and indeed the only thing he could do, to find Miss Rivers, the stranger American lady, who had shown such an unaccountable and daring interest in his uncle's

well-being; and to consult with her what was now to be done.

It was worse than folly for him to appeal for help or counsel to any one in the village; rude and unthinking as these peasants were, what strength or wisdom had they to help him in this matter?

He had his dreadful suspicions, nay, convictions, that foul play was at work with his uncle, but how was he to prove or prevent it?

Every one knew that he had been turned adrift, disinherited and disgraced; anything he might accuse his successful rivals of would only rebound on his own head, as the jealous slander of disappointment.

Having searched, then, through the village, for Miss Rivers, and discovered not the smallest clew concerning her, suddenly he awoke to the horrible conviction that she had been foully dealt with; she had been last seen by him at the mercy of—*was it* not Vulpino, that sinister foreigner who haunted the Weald, and who was forever muttering and whispering with the conspirators?

So he had neither eaten nor slept, until, by dint of incredibly kept vigils, he had surprised the Italian riding off on one of Mr. Derwent's best steeds across the shire, up—up further and further north, to Hoarshire, where Feltrie stood, grand and desolate, with its little ruined, haunted lodge rotting in the fens.

And now that they were together, Geoffrey asked Monica, what next?

"How long is it since you were put out of the house?" she asked, her vivid perceptions of her father's desperate situation inspiring her with the superhuman strength of excitement; for she knew far better than Geoffrey how imminent was the peril in which he had left his uncle.

"It is now about thirty hours," he replied.

She clasped her hands and flashed a wild glance heavenward.

"Anything may have happened in thirty hours," faltered she; "oh, Geoffrey, dear Geoffrey, you should never have left the threshold of my father's victim's house, but have warned the neighborhood, and made the country ring with shouts for admittance."

She was not thinking of anything personal now; she was utterly unconscious of the form of her address to the young man. He saw this, and was thrilled through the heart with a passing rapture, that she should have him in her mind with such a kind sentiment, and in spite of the grief and dismay which her moan sent over him he could scarcely refrain from touching her caressingly and soothingly.

"Don't anticipate the worst, dear Miss Rivers," he said, gently. "They would not dare, you know, to make too quick an end of him; they will wait for either his wounds to kill him, or—or" (in spite of himself his lips whitened as he surmised this)—"or for *hydrophobia*."

"Oh, no! no!" gasped she. "Tell me, Geoffrey, a strange thought strikes me—tell me, dear—while you watched by him did you see any of the symptoms—the spasms—the delirium—the convulsions at the sight of water?"

"Not one," he answered.

"The dog was not mad!" she cried out, flashingly. "I recollect now what Rufus Marshall said—that he had a plan to work on Mr. Derwent's imagination, that is it; he almost shouted in Mr. Derwent's ear, as he lay there in the forest, that the dog was mad—but he had managed somehow to goad the brute to temporary ferocity. That was *his* part of the plot, Gavaine's was to stab the dog so that it would never be discovered that it was not mad, and his murderous impulse seized the opportunity, and he stabbed Mr. Derwent, too, though I believe that was not in the programme. It was all mixed up, and did not happen exactly as they thought; they did not expect *me* to arrive on the scene, and when I did, and fought with the dog, I suppose Gavaine lost his head a little, or thought the dog had not bitten their victim, so he tried to end the matter with his own knife, not expecting me to be able to observe; but I think I saw everything all at once. Somehow, without even looking, I knew *all they did, and wanted to do*. Rufus tried his best to shoot Mr. Derwent, just as Gavaine tried to stab him, both making the dog an excuse to commit the blunder, as they would afterward call it, and then, fearful that, after all, they had not butchered him quite dead, Rufus took pains to make him understand that the dog was mad, trusting to his imagination, which that traitress, Miss Montacute, told them was abnormally vivid, to kill him with the apprehension of hydrophobia. But again an unexpected check came in—you persistently sticking by him; they had got rid of me—and, oh, how it proves their guilt that they considered it necessary to murder me lest I should testify against them—they had got rid of me, but they could not at first get rid of you, and your presence lengthened out their victim's life until, as you say, the physician could come and see for himself that he was not mortally injured by the stab-wounds, and cauterize the dog-bite, and see that there were no symptoms of hydrophobia; so they had to make another plan, and affect to take him away to Paris as soon as he could be moved; and then, alas! they got you away, and now?"

In her rapid synopsis of the events, Monica had unconsciously risen, and was leaning white and ghostlike, but with electrically inspired face, on the back of her chair, gazing into Geoffrey's fascinated eyes. But with the last shuddering—"and now?"—all her heart-anguish surged back upon her, and swayed and bowed her poor little attenuated form so that she would have sunk to the floor, crushed down completely, had not Geoffrey snatched her to him, holding her passionately close to his loudly-beating breast, and trembling in every limb at the dear con-

tact of this, to him, the loveliest and bravest woman in the world.

"Sweet little girl!" he breathed in her ear, in tones vibrant with feeling, "who are you, then, who have come from the ends of the earth to dare all this and to suffer all this for my poor, lonely uncle?"

She started violently. In her natural reliance on, and confidence in, this fine, true-hearted young Englishman, she had long forgotten her own secret, that she was his uncle's daughter—his cousin, the true heir of all this proud estate that was being fought for with such bloody malignity; how would he look upon her if she were to announce this most unexpected and long-hidden fact?

Would it make any difference in this—this generous and noble kindness, which he was showing to a poor, unknown stranger?

"Tell me dear, dear," he pleaded, his warm hand passing with tender stroke over and over her silky hair, and his clear eyes full of manly admiration and faith in her, "is there anything in your wonderful resemblance to that old portrait of Mistress Ethelgiva Derwent, in my uncle's gallery? You might have walked out of its frame; your eyes—do you guess what glories they are, dear?—your thick, heavy black hair—your proud poise, and these patrician hands and feet—they are all fair Ethelgiva's very own! Why do you look so strangely at me, dear girl, dear Monica—(oh, let me call you Monica!)"

With an abrupt movement Monica released herself from his encircling arms; faint, feeble and agitated as she was, and natural as it had been to cling to this her only friend and protector through these terrible troubles, she could not now rest on his heart while he poured out so unconsciously its full tumultuous torrent of love.

If he knew that long dim history of Otto Derwent's marriage with poor Ada Rivers, the daughter of a country schoolmaster, and his after desertion of her, caused by some calumny, which to this day the daughter could not prove false—if Geoffrey Kilmyre, the proud, high-born Geoffrey Kilmyre, knew all this—would he see Monica Derwent as fair and lovable then?

So, with this doubt lying like Aladdin's sword between them, she slipped out of his arms, and spoke next across the wall of convention.

"We must not waste time talking thus," she said, reseating herself, and waving him to a chair at her side; "how little it matters about anything now, except his safety."

"True! True! What a selfish beast I am, to stray off to my own affairs!" (Monica's resemblance to Mistress Ethelgiva Derwent was one of "his own affairs," was it?) "until we have my poor uncle safely with our two selves and getting well again! But, dear Miss Rivers, I pray you, don't resent my admiration and gratitude toward you; I cannot help it, indeed I cannot help it! These strange events, in which we have met together, seem to have thrown our hearts together, too, as no years of conventional intimacy could have done; it seems as if, all that having happened to you and me, the whole world had fallen away from about us, leaving us two standing free together. Whoever you are, brave Monica, you are the one woman for—"

"Oh, hush!" she murmured, her face suffused with carmine blushes, and her sweet eyes shining; "you are too noble, too unworldly—wait, only wait, until all this wild time is over, and you can prove and sift me well; never speak of this again till then!"

Her manner was so proudly decisive, despite all its grateful fervor, that Geoffrey could only accept her verdict, and place her the higher in his heart for its womanly dignity.

And how hotly she in her heart was recalling the abominable slanders uttered of this noble-hearted gentleman, by the dastard Rufus Marshall to Mr. Derwent, that evening when she waited in the corridor outside his door for the two parasites to depart, that she might warn him of them! This man—a profligate, a spendthrift, an associate of ballet-dancers and the *demi-monde*! "The purchaser of the Duke of Malthraver's toy villa for his mistress, the sister of that beast the prize-fighter," etc., etc., etc. How accurately she remembered all that had been said!

In the burning, indignation with which she contrasted the reality with Marshall's representations, Monica very nearly came throwing aside all her newly-donned propriety, and holding out her hand to him in a close clasp, that would assure him how truly she believed in him, and how gladly she bade him to hope for the very best in that future to which she referred him; and he, almost dazzled by the intense expression on her radiant face, had all he could do to refrain from disobeying her, and there and then asking her flatly to be his promised wife, let what would happen in the future!

And so they bent toward each other, poring over each other's eloquently-discouraging eyes, fascinated by each other, and breathless with delicious emotion; until a shadow darkened the little window by which Monica's chair was set; and, both looking up, beheld Mr. Price, the New York lawyer, passing round the cottage, with his gaze fastened inquisitively upon them.

"Now, who is this? I do not know him at all, do you?" cried Geoffrey, much startled by the sudden exclamation and look of deep resentment which overspread Monica's countenance.

"I know him—a mercenary traitor!" she replied, and she turned toward the door with flashing eyes, listening to the peremptory knocking at the outer door. Geoffrey saw how strongly moved she was, and refrained from any more questions.

They heard the stranger demand to see "the young lady"—he was wily enough even in the midst of his present perturbation to utter no name, lest he might be prematurely disclosing facts unknown as yet, facts which he had spent many a dollar in reserving

to himself and partner, in the hope of making capital out of them.

Cicely's voice was then heard stoutly refusing any admittance whatever to the presence of "the young lady;" and then Mr. Price's reiterated demand, and a sound of his entrance by force; then the gruff tones of Toby and his heavy stride across the floor to eject the intruder.

"Let him come," said Monica to Geoffrey, scornfully; "he has something to tell that has completely taken him out of himself; otherwise he would never wish for another interview with me. Our last was anything but an amicable one."

Geoffrey pushed open the bedroom door, and checked Toby in the act of hustling out the gentlemanly and indignantly-resisting Mr. Price.

"You may see her," he said, a shadow of the scorn he had caught on Monica's face reflected in his own.

Toby released him with a grunt, and the spruce young lawyer almost sprung across the kitchen into the presence of the young lady, whose obstinacy had led him such a dance.

For a moment he stood transfixed, scanning with shocked amazement the signs of her late sufferings, the vehement words he had meant to utter frozen on his lips.

"I have been ill," she said, quietly, a chill feeling passing over her as she noted how pale he had been even before he saw her, and the appearance of recent agitation which that shock was changing into wondering compassion. What had he to say that should have so discomposed him? Was his expected prey, Mr. Derwent, beyond his reach?

Dead?

"Never mind me," she cried, breathlessly; "what do you want of me?"

"Good heavens, madam!" he said, wiping the drops of perspiration from his forehead, and laying his hat on the table with a visibly-trembling hand; "what fatal influence is at work among the Derwents? You are dying! And your father—"

A strange cry rung through the room, drowning the end of his speech. It was the mingled shout of astonishment from Geoffrey, and the scream of terror from Monica.

"HER FATHER!!!"

"What? Is he—oh, is he—gone?" she moaned, forgetting everything but her anxiety, not even feeling Geoffrey's greedily-grasping hands, as he drew her rapturously to his breast, in his turn oblivious of all save that she was a Derwent, his uncle's daughter—highborn as he himself, and free to be won for his wife, as any lady in England.

"Yes—he is gone!" hoarsely muttered Mr. Price, grown reckless under the conviction that more unscrupulous rascals than himself had been running this conspiracy, and that foul play had been used on both father and daughter. "God knows, Miss Derwent, if I had dreamed that these relatives, these Marshall brothers, intended harm to you, I never should have revealed who you were to them!"

Ay? He had gone with his precious secret to them, had revealed that this stranger was Otto Derwent's daughter—that explained their ruthless attempt upon her life!

"When—did—he—die?" gasped Monica, her miserable eyes fixed piteously upon the trembling young sharper, whose avarice had brought all this horror upon him, as at present he was remorsefully owning to himself.

For a moment he looked bewildered, then cried hastily:

"Did I say he was dead? No, no, I did not mean that; oh no, Miss Derwent, thank the Lord no one says that; but he has been spirited away to France by these scoundrels; and by the look of you, I suspect that they have been trying to put you out of the world altogether; and if they would try that on you—they will on him!"

He was interrupted by a tremulous cry from Monica; she slipped out of Geoffrey's supporting arms to her knees, and there, between the men, she uttered a prayer of voiceless thanksgiving to the Good God for sparing her that anguish; and as they watched her white lips moving, and the radiance of meek and fervid gratitude upon her spectral face, a rush of manly emotion filled both their eyes with tears, through which they looked at her, seeing in her an angel.

CHAPTER XXI.

"WISE MEN GET THEIR OWN."

THIS thrill of common humanity drew these natural antagonists closer to each other in sympathy than it would have seemed possible, considering the poor figure which Mr. Price had ever cut in Miss Derwent's eyes; but the young fellow was not bad very far down, had a warm heart, and head enough to let it speak *sometimes*; and then, there are few young men who can withstand the charm of a young woman's heroism. Mr. Gilbert Price contemplated this brave girl, who had proudly rejected his aid to get into her father's good graces for the sake of his fortune—and yet who could suffer such cruelties as were here manifested on her poor ghastly face—for that same father's sake, resolutely maintaining her incognita all the while; and every moment longer that he contemplated her, he regretted the more his dealings against her, and longed to make some sort of restitution, if only he knew how.

Consequently, when next he spoke, it was to say: "God forgive me for my part in this ugly business, Miss Derwent; if ever man heartily repented his misdeeds, I do at this moment, seeing you. Bless my soul, what have they done to you?"

His earnestness convinced both Geoffrey and Monica that he was really sorry for the past; so Geoffrey narrated Monica's sufferings in a few words; and then Monica struck in impetuously, demanding Mr. Price's news.

"Let me make a clean breast of it, Miss Derwent."

said he, looking pale and sick at the recital; "good God! to think that I am the cause of all! Why, what devils these men are! But how was I to dream? Well, well, I can only range myself on your side henceforth, and work my level best to undo the mischief I have done, and win your forgiveness. And now, madam, collect yourself; and you, sir, make her comfortable. I have a long story to tell, which must be narrated carefully, or she will not half-comprehend it, for it was the different natures of the various actors, and their private feelings toward each other, that made such a tragedy possible."

Monica was tenderly propped up in Cicely's big easy-chair, her little thin hands clasped in her lap in patient interest, and her sweet eyes shining up in the lawyer's face with a kind softness in them that stimulated his eloquence immeasurably, and helped him to do himself justice at last.

Geoffrey retired behind his new-found cousin's chair, where he leaned with one hand resting warm and appropriative on her shoulder, and a possibility of bending over her and looking straight into her eyes whenever the climaxes of the story gave him an excuse. Mr. Price sat at a little distance from the pair, humbly apart, but the more he said the nearer they felt him coming to them in the spirit; so that, by the end, he seemed to be almost a friend, and one of themselves.

"I shall first relieve your anxiety about your father," he began; "then confess my dealings with these men, the Messrs. Marshall; and afterward I shall hand you, Miss Derwent, a document containing the history of the separation of your parents nineteen years ago, and how the secret came into my possession. And now I shall have the deserved humiliation of speaking from my late standpoint of scheming scamp; rather hard on a fellow, eh?"

"Having once more appealed to your cupidity in vain—on the hunting field, you recollect, my resolution was taken to carry my precious secret to Mr. Derwent; but then came his accident, as I, in common with everybody else, was taught to suppose it, by the wily Rufus, who went about disseminating the version that best suited their plots. I made several attempts to see Mr. Derwent for myself, so as to judge of his state of health, whether he was as dangerously ill as they said, in which case the sooner I made capital out of the secret the better; or whether he was recovering, when it would be worth my while to wait. I soon saw that it was their intention to allow no one to see him; so then I guessed that they were the parties in power, and that it was to them I should apply."

"I was amazed, too, at your disappearance, and made inquiries everywhere, but was told at last (by Rufus Marshall) that you had left the neighborhood, having only been visiting the place for change of air. I knew better than that myself; and their lame story made me suspect that they had found out who you were, and that there was more behind. With this idea on my mind I began to sound them; naturally undervaluing the astuteness of an insignificant cad like the elder Marshall, but before I knew, the crafty fox had it all out of me that you were Mr. Derwent's lawful and only child, to whom he ought to leave his money; I little suspected the hypocrisy of their avowals of delight, and their fuss to discover where you had gone. I believe that knowledge sealed your doom; they had probably intended to keep you out of the way until Mr. Derwent's death, lest you should betray what you had overheard of their conspiracy; but as soon as it was proved that you were his daughter, they determined to do away with you altogether. Heavens! had I known the true nature of their plots, I should—well, you're safe in spite of them, the varlets, that's a consolation."

"And Vulpino, thank God, is getting a pretty considerable taste of the same kind of treatment which they gave you. Ha! ha! ha! I like to think of the murderous knave lying yonder, yelling for—beg pardon, Miss Derwent, I'm a brute to recall anything so painful to you."

"Well, to go on with my tale: I had already discovered that Mr. Derwent had made a new will within the last month, naming the two brothers Marshall as his sole and joint heirs, with the exception of a small annuity to Mr. Geoffrey Kilmyre, whom it is evident he can never succeed in driving completely from his heart, although so poisoned by the slanders which these rascals continually retail about your private life, sir; yes, Mr. Derwent has made his will in their favor, and only one step is between them and the goal toward which they have been pressing so successfully. Having disclosed to them the fact of the existence of a Miss Derwent, I waited for them to make me an offer for my silence on the matter, but was astonished to see them take the startling news quietly; they only passed a significant glance and nodded at each other. I see now, they had already got you in their own hands, as a chance overhearer of their perilous schemes. To find that you were so much more important a person than they had suspected, mattered nothing to their plans—only it changed your temporary imprisonment into death by starvation. I had played the game badly, very badly, or rather perhaps, they had all the winning cards, and I did not guess it. They made no offer to buy my silence; they simply thanked me for my very extraordinary and welcome news, promised to find their new relative, Miss Derwent, and to present her to her father, and politely showed me out."

"I had made a mess of it, sure enough, after working so long, and spending so much hard cash in advertisements, traveling, etc. Ha! I was I on the outside of Dornoch-Weald; Mr. Derwent, to whom my news was so interesting, too ill to know or care about anything; Miss Derwent, to whom they were so important, obdurate in refusing to be set right with her father by me, and the Marshall brothers, to

whom they were so ruinous, too indifferent to care whether I published them or not.

"I thought it all over, and saw there must be some strong motive for their unnatural stoicism, under facts that would have utterly extinguished all their expectations; and then I set myself to ferret out the truth.

"I watched events as well as I could from the outside; I saw all the old servants set adrift, and from them I heard the state of siege in which you, Mr. Kilmyre, sat by your uncle's bed, and also learned the interesting fact that Miss Montacute was in league with the Marshalls.

"Then came Mr. Kilmyre's ejection; I don't know how; I can never believe that you abandoned your uncle voluntarily, sir; ah, I thought you did not. Well, at all events, there lay the rich man who had made his will in favor of these two harpies, dying, and not a soul by him but they. They had just learned the existence of a daughter, and that I knew facts concerning her that would cause her father to receive her with favor, and consequently that it only remained for Mr. Derwent to hear this and to alter his will in his daughter's favor. I began to see the significance of things.

"The old, faithful servants sent away, the nephew whom Mr. Derwent had disinherited through their lies, but whom he could not quite drive from his heart, got rid of mysteriously, the incognita daughter vanished, the sick man alone with them, and the countryside taught to think that he was in danger of hydrophobia.

"I saw that there was only one more event to happen, and that they meant it to happen.

"Mr. Derwent had to die.

"It took me until this very morning to piece all this out, and then, all in a moment, I got wild with anxiety; I cursed my own double-dealing that had put so much power in the hands of two who might be villains of the blackest dye, for all I knew.

"I was sitting in my own room at the inn when I suddenly saw the whole thing in a flash; I was at my breakfast. I jumped up, scarcely taking time to find my hat, and ran every step of the way to the Weald. As I entered the gates I met that foreign doctor that they had had prowling about them, Vulpino. He was riding one of Mr. Derwent's horses, going, as I know now, to Hoarshire to hide the body of Miss Derwent, whom he supposed to be dead by this time. He stopped me as I shot past him, by shouting out, 'The house is closed, nobody there.' I did not believe him, but went back to hear what he had to say. He told me that Mr. Derwent had been taken away by the Marshalls and Miss Montacute; they had started very early this morning, and were going by easy stages to Paris, where was a celebrated doctor who could cure hydrophobia. It struck like a knife to my heart that they were dragging the sick man to some lonely place where they could murder him and bury the body, without having to expose the corpse to all the country as they would have to do if he died at the Weald. I asked as many questions as I could think of to trap him, but he was on his guard and would not be tripped up. Then I vowed I would follow the party, and then he disposed of me by saying that the party had arranged to go by water, as that was an easier mode of traveling for an invalid than rail. Vulpino rode off, and I went up to the house and reconnoitered. Every window had the shutters up; the very stables were vacant, the horses all sent to Mr. Derwent's stables in town, so as to dispense with any servants who might witness the condition of Mr. Derwent when they took him away.

"So then I was at my wits' end, but at last I thought of coming here to consult with the gamekeeper, Toby Hurlbutt, who, I had heard, was faithfully attached to Mr. Kilmyre, and who, I thought, might be able to tell me where he was. And then I saw you, Miss Derwent, thank God, alive yet.

"We must consult together what can be done to trace the party, which I don't in the least believe will go out of England."

Mr. Price had by this time so well redeemed himself in their respect, that, at the conclusion of his narration, both thanked him heartily for his goodness of heart in feeling such anxiety on Mr. Derwent's account, and for his exertions on his behalf. They then conferred together how best to institute a search for the sick man and his brood of viper attendants.

Having discussed all probabilities, they determined to start at once in pursuit; making such inquiries at the station as would set them on the track of the four travelers.

So Geoffrey put his new-found cousin Monica under the protection of honest Toby and his pretty wife, presenting her to them in her own proper person, to their blank amazement firstly, and soon their exultant delight that master had got such a "sweet lady" for a daughter. Geoffrey also placed Vulpino in Toby's charge, directing him to keep him for the present secured at the shooting-box; then there was a quiet but very significant parting between Monica and Geoffrey, a murmured "God speed you, and give you success!" from Monica, and "Get well and brave again, darling cousin!" from Geoffrey. Mr. Price, before he went, handed a thick sealed packet to Miss Derwent, saying:

"This is a precious document to you, Miss Derwent. It contains the account of the cause of the estrangement between your parents, and the vindication of your mother. Some six months ago I was summoned by a prisoner, in the Tombs for trying to wreck a train, to take up his case. Before it came into court he fell mortally ill; and on his death-bed made this confession. He was the Jonathan Brade you will read about here. It was this story which induced Mr. Korner and myself to advertise for Ada Rivers Derwent; in the hope of reinstating her in her rights. Brade's story set us to investigating Mr. Derwent's circumstances. We easily discovered his

residence and fortune by sending an agent to the county named in Brade's story. Brade, however, maliciously concealed the address of Mrs. Derwent, by which cause we were delayed full three months, advertising, and then we only found her dead. Read it; you will only love and admire your unfortunate mother the more deeply when you learn her cruel story. It will also soften your indignation against Mr. Derwent, who was equally deceived. But read it for yourself. I shall narrate it to Mr. Kilmyre as we go along."

They were gone, leaving the packet in Monica's lap, her hollow eyes raised in loving grief and tenderness toward the heavens, where now shone in joy the pure sweet spirit which had suffered such wrong and misery on earth.

CHAPTER XXII.

STORY OF A VULTURE AND A DOVE.

THE following is the purport of the document:

Twenty years ago Mr. Otto Montacute Derwent, a young Englishman of wealth and station, was traveling through the United States.

He came to a remote village, named Addiscombe, in the State of Vermont, and stopped there for a few days' fishing in the beautiful lake. One lovely evening he sauntered down to the shore with a rustic chum, and stepped into a boat which was just pushing off, with one passenger in it in the shape of a very young girl.

The girl made a very lovely and unexpected picture, sitting there in her gauzy Swiss dress, and fleecy white Shetland shawl, with her hat in her lap, and her rich black tresses waving down to her waist, with one burning red poppy behind her small ivory-white ear. She held the tiller in her little brown shapely hands, and her dark eyes were sparkling roguishly, her white teeth glittering between her arched, crimson lips, as she teased and railed at the tall, stalwart young man who directly faced her, with his pair of oars touching her knee with each pull; and his harsh-featured, resolute face scarcely rippling in the faintest response to her low-toned, playful badinage. This was Ada Rivers on her way home from a little party at the house of a friend across the lake, and the tall swain was her escort, Jonathan Brade, the best match in the little town of Addiscombe, and her devoted admirer for the past year. He owned quite a fine farm about a mile out of town, and had been an industrious and thrifty worker on it; his old-maid sister Patty kept house for him, and he was well on in the thirties himself, so that when he did fall in love, he fell much deeper in than younger men would have done, and wooed hotly and desperately, because there was no reason why he should not marry his choice instantly, everything being ready for her. But he was in some respects an odd man, and little Ada Rivers, the flirting, flighty, gleeful village darling and belle, rather fought shy of him, feeling a little secret dismay at his moody, taciturn ways, and his quiet but indomitable persistence in the pursuit of anything he ever chanced to set his heart on. She hid this evidence of his power over her, however, under a mischievous sauciness, bantering and teasing him as not a woman in Addiscombe had ever dared to do before; and her spritish impudence seemed to charm him only the more, and to draw him after her only the more constantly.

This was the state of matters between them when Otto Derwent saw her first, not yet engaged, but with every probability that they would be, and not a single reason why they should not.

Astonished and enchanted at the little saucy fairy, Derwent asked his chum all about her, learned that she was the schoolmaster's daughter, and lived in the rose-twined cottage across the road from the schoolhouse; and then he made up his mind that he would not leave this pleasant spot quite yet.

And so he got himself introduced to Ada, and in spite of Jonathan's grim silence, and the askant looks of the furtively-chuckling swains, he strolled home between the pair, in apparent innocence of any design, and ignorance of the situation.

And after that—of course.

Very soon Ada drew back decidedly from Jonathan; and in spite of his black and moody scowl, made him understand that she meant it.

Jonathan went home to his sister Patty, who wrung the matter out of him, and secretly thanked Heaven that the terror of her life, a usurper of her domestic throne, was mercifully removed; also she vowed in her soul that Ada Rivers should marry the stranger, and so she would never be dethroned from her place at the head of Jon's house.

Jonathan, however, had by no means given up his intention of winning Ada; but he was not the man to utter in mortal ear the thoughts that were wont to pass through his slow, sullen brain. He brooded over his rejection long after every one had taken it for granted that all was over between them, and while all the village was gossiping about the daring little belle's conquest of the proud British swell, and wondering what it would all come to, Jonathan was apparently plodding on in his usual rut, but in reality with a very hell raging in his breast.

And meanwhile Patty, the sour old-maid sister was furtively pushing matters between Ada and Otto, smoothing true love's path, as surely old-maid never did before; making rash and hasty acts seem all-wise and possible, and tempting the love-gladdened young things, until—

Well, when Mr. Derwent's stay had been prolonged to eight months, one evening Patty sneered at her brother, sitting moodily at the hearth mending an ox-whip—thus:

"Guess 'tain't much use you makin' a fool of yourself after that little chit, brother; the Englishman's to old Rivers's half the time, an' I reckon he wouldn't be hangin' on so long ef he wasn't gittin' the vally of his time. My advice is, go oncet for all an' see what ye kin make of her; ef she'll hev ye

I'm agreed, for I'm tired an' sick of your glum sulkiness—"

And without a word Jonathan rose, donned his Sunday coat, and hied him across the fields for a last appeal.

Patty had just put her finger to the stone that had hung so long on the balance, her touch sent it rolling down the precipice ready now to crush whatever got in its way.

Patty knew that the old schoolmaster was off for a couple of days to the next town; and that Otto would on that account be obliged, in the interests of propriety, to omit his usual evening visit; for he was guarding his darling's fair fame with all generosity—Patty knew all this, for was she not their confidante, and knew all about their happy secret?

So Jonathan found pretty Ada all alone, sitting in the broad fireplace with the cat in her lap, and her eyes fixed in a tender reverie on the ruby coals.

Poor child! She started up with a faint cry of nervous terror when her dark-hearted visitor strode in without even the ceremony of knocking; she was only a timid, easily frightened little girl, and she was so accustomed to Otto's protection.

Jonathan saw her terror, and Satan took entire possession of him. He forgot that he had come to ask her to be his wife, he forgot everything except that the tender lovely creature before him was white with fear of him, an honest man in her own station, and in love with Otto Derwent, who, of course, was only amusing himself with her. He burst into a furious tirade against the Englishman; he spoke many things that the trembling girl could not comprehend—insolent, outrageous things, which no one but a devil could have thought of in that pure presence; and Ada only comprehended that he was abusing and threatening Otto Derwent, the life of her heart—and looking in his demoniac face, and seeing the horrible excitement which swayed the usually grimly-contained Brade, her senses reeled, she put out her arms with a faint cry, and then fell forward in a swoon. The man received her in his arms; and, having got her there, his fury was extinguished in a fierce gust of joy. He stood gaping at her—she had never been so close to him before; he could verily feel the satin cheek against his neck, and smell the faint perfume of her flowing tresses. Oh, she was beautiful beyond compare! And he adored—he worshiped her!

What would he not do to possess this wildly-coveted prize?

What would he not suffer? Oh, to snatch her up and fly with her there and then!

A gentle tap at the window broke in upon his half-crazy thoughts, then the sash was raised a few inches, and a white hand flung in a knot of snowy roses.

This was the lover's greeting—the lover whom she loved.

Something flashed into Jonathan's slow brain; he fairly laughed out as it occurred to him.

If he could only make appearances, seem black enough.

Derwent was standing outside the window, waiting for his little love to acknowledge the sweet greeting he had flung her, and too honorable to lift the shade and look into the room until she had given him permission.

Jonathan went to the sofa and sat down with his broad back to the window. He drew Ada's arms round his neck; and he placed her head upon his shoulder, with the face hidden, as if she nestled in his arms in an abandon of love. He bent his own evil exulting face upon her pretty head; and then he began to speak aloud; telling how sweet she was, how dear—

A crash of glass behind him showed that Otto had heard; Jonathan looked round to see the young Englishman leaning in out of the black night, convulsed, whitened in a single moment.

He made a great show of catching Ada's head closer to his sheltering breast—of whispering courage in her ear, and then he turned and laughed into Derwent's eyes.

"It's all up, is it?" he sneered: "ye come at an awkward time, my brave buck. Here, Ada, we may as well show our hand, give the softy his answer. What? frightened? I reckon I kin protect ye, dear, don't ye mind him."

But Ada was unconscious, so of course she said nothing; and Derwent supposed that the unexpected denouement had made her faint.

He came round the house and strode into the room.

He saw his darling Ada with both arms about the grisly throat of the man she had always professed to shrink from with instinctive fear—the man who had been her lover before he ever saw her—he saw her little head nestling on that man's heart, exactly as it had lain so often on his.

He had come unawares upon the pair; they had not suspected his vicinity; he had caught them at last in one of many such interviews, doubtless.

"Fool!" snarled Jonathan, with a bitter curse to qualify the epithet, "did ye think ye could get her from me, after all's been between us?"

Derwent seemed to be struck into stone. For a few minutes he did nothing but stand gazing at the pair as if he would never move his eyes again.

A last he said in a strange, heart-struck voice:

"Man, do you not know then that that woman is my wife?"

No, Jonathan had not dreamed it, and the news struck him dumb in his turn; and Derwent mistook the fierce contortion of his features for a devilish grin of derision, and, struck to the very heart of his pride and his love, believed the very worst.

"For seven months that vile thing you hold to your vile heart has been my lawfully-wedded wife."

"And as good as mine," put in Jonathan, inspired by Satan.

"I see," said the aristocrat, writhing as much with humiliation as with grief—"she married me

for my money, but *you* were her heart's choice before I came. I regret as much as you do her desertion of you; I regret it so much that I freely give her back to you. I shall never look upon her face again. Take her and may—"he finished that fatal speech by a curse upon them both that made even the hard bad man who alone heard it, quake.

That was the last that ever Ada saw of her young husband; or anybody else in Addiscombe.

Jonathan could scarcely credit his success.

The high heart of the hated Englishman had recoiled from its love at the first breath of suspicion—Jonathan could have yelled with laughter at the marvellous folly of the man.

Was that all he understood of Ada Rivers's pure nature yet, and she his wife too? Why, even Jonathan, dull-witted, clod-hopper Jonathan, knew better than that!

All right. Since the Englishman's crazy pride stood so much his friend, he would take advantage of his opportunity; Derwent might come back any moment, and examining details, discover his own idiocy.

Let Jonathan put the capstone on helpless Ada's infamy.

He snatched up the first wrap, wound the slight form in it, and strode through the lonely lanes and starless night to his own house.

Patty glared at the apparition with eyes starting from their sockets. She thought Jonathan had murdered Ada for rage, having discovered that she had married Derwent.

Patty had known of this marriage; she it was who had planned it and made it possible; she it was who had talked over the simple-hearted old schoolmaster to let the young folks come into their happiness first as well as last—and made it seem only prudent to keep it secret until Derwent dared announce his marriage to the proud old father at home, to which end he was improving little Ada's education and manners, so as to present her a well-bred lady whose beauty and modesty might commend her to the patrician father.

And now, what was this?

In a few muttered sentences Jonathan told the story. Patty fiercely asked him what he was going to do with the girl now? Then Jonathan, having laid the unconscious girl down, turned on his sister with an expression that well-nigh petrified her.

"What was he going to do with the girl?"

He was going to fix it so that Derwent would desert her, and then he was going to marry her himself. He guessed there were chances for getting a divorce when he wanted it for her; meanwhile, let Patty mind how she meddled, except to help. For as sure as she did, and Derwent came back to Ada, he, Jonathan, would shoot Derwent if all the world was looking on.

Patty trembled and swore obedience. It was her one terror that he would find out her part in the marriage.

Jonathan carried Ada to an upper room, locked the door, and went out with the key in his pocket. He was off to track Derwent; and he found him, as he expected, back at the cottage, looking in vain for Ada, and struck with yet deeper conviction of her perfidy, since she was absent. Jonathan tracked Derwent in his half-crazed wanderings all that night, and left him at dawn asleep from very exhaustion under the frozen trees, with the winter blast fast chilling his life-blood.

He went home to hear the panic-stricken screams of Ada from her prison, and to find Patty crouched against the door, shaking with horror and fear. The cruel villain would allow no explanation whatever, and forced his sister to promise that she would not utter one word to the captive, until he gave her leave; and he listened and spied lest she should disobey him, until the woman, timorous by nature as she was sly and secret, did his hard bidding in very terror, well-nigh maddening poor mystified Ada in her prison by the monstrous cruelty of her unexplained situation.

A week passed, and affairs stood thus.

Otto Derwent was off to England, convinced of his wife's infidelity. Mr. Rivers, with whom Otto had held a terrible interview, was lying unconscious at his home, struck down with paralysis at the terror and shame of his accusations.

Jonathan waited for the ripening of his scheme, concealing from every soul the hiding-place of Ada, whom the townspeople believed now to have eloped with Derwent. Patty was rising from the ashes once more into her old crafty, determined self; and considering ways and means of getting the unwelcome captive out of Jonathan's clutches.

And Ada, wearied with vain appeals, and crushed with forebodings, cowed under fate, callous to any fresh blow.

When Derwent was beyond recall, Jonathan dared into his victim's presence, and explained matters.

He told her that Derwent had come to her home that night just as she fainted, and furiously ordered him out of the house; that he had answered hotly; that there had ensued a fierce quarrel, during which Derwent had tried to shoot him; that they had then gone out some half a mile into the woods to have the duel out; that at the moment Derwent fired, a belated traveler was passing along the invisible road in his sulky—a two-wheeled, one-seated wagon; that the ball went through his head, killing him instantly; that the quarrel was dropped in the horror of the accident, and both men ran down to the road and saw the man was a stranger; that he, Jonathan, had counseled Derwent to carry out an idea which would save him—namely, to turn the horse's head back on the way he had come, and set him galloping off from instead of into Addiscombe with his fatal burden.

And that Derwent, in his first agitation and despair, had done so.

The rest of the tale might have been almost anything, and Ada would have comprehended it as little as she did what he made it.

She felt her heart die within her; she saw the whole fabric of her admiration and belief in her young husband smitten to the very dust. He had killed a man—that would have been nothing but a bitter, never-to-be-forgotten trouble, to be shared by his wife to the end, however dark that end might be; but to turn coward, to stoop to a base deception, to abandon the victim of his passion—alas! her hero lay slain before her, and had he approached her at that moment, soft and tender as she had ever been, and passionately as she had adored him, all the scorn in her nature would have lashed out to taunt and sting him, and to drive him from her sight forever.

After that it mattered little that he had fled, not even taking time to return to his home to bid an eternal farewell to the innocent wife who had loved him so. She never heard Jonathan's hypocritical excuses for the absent murderer; his crawling excuses, such as—"Poor fellow, he could not help his nature, which was not bold and rugged like my own; doubtless the thought of his proud family in England made him a little more of a coward than he would otherwise have been; the suddenness and the first impulse," etc., etc., oh, miserable, abject cowardice, how was it you could have lurked in Otto's heart all this time, unsuspected?

The young wife's loving tears dried on her burning cheeks; her torn heart throbbed high with disdain; in that hour her nature so changed that she was able to live the long, lonely life which lay before her, without one yearning effort to communicate with her husband, although she knew his address perfectly well.

Jonathan then explained that he had carried her that night home to his own house, fearing to leave her a prey to anxiety on Derwent's account, when he did not appear the next day; and her inquiries might have set the village people to looking after him; he had also feared to let any explanation be made to her until Derwent's escape was secured, and he was really on his way to Britain.

She listened no more; but with a strange, bitter dignity thanked him for the trouble he had been at, and asked him to leave her.

Jonathan did so, satisfied that the old love was already cast out of her heart, and chuckling over the luck he had had in his choice of falsehoods which would keep these two separate. Let time work a little now, he would yet win her.

But that night Ada, with the eager assistance of Patty, fled from Addiscombe.

Patty had got her her few valuables, and all the money Derwent had flung on the schoolmaster's table for his unfaithful wife; so Ada was independent.

Jonathan could not credit her departure. What! would she abandon her old father?

His hurried visit to the schoolmaster's home explained her unfilial conduct.

The old man lay dead; his withered hands clasped upon his poor old broken heart: there were drops like diamonds glittering on his forehead. The wretched daughter had left her last kisses and tears on the dead face of her only, her last, her ever true and faithful friend; she had nothing to linger for.

So then a whole year passed, and Jonathan, grown blacker-hearted, weary of wandering, found her at Loangerie, sewing lace.

She was known there as Mrs. Rivers, a widow, and she had a little daughter six months old.

Jonathan boldly explained his wishes. He could get her a divorce from her murderer-husband, a perfectly satisfactory divorce, thanks to the flexible laws of some of the States; and then he would be willing to marry her, in spite of all that had been said and done.

The pseudo-widow looked him in the face and bade him go, leave her in peace.

He retired for that time, disconcerted, but hopeful; and he hung about the little town and was always in her path. She got restive, and seeking him out one day, told him with scornful bitterness that he was only wasting his time; she never would consider herself free from Otto Derwent until she heard of his death.

Then Jonathan's patience fled; he first pleaded and besought, lover-fashion; at last he threatened and cursed, and she told him that she loathed him, and always would.

So then he saw that all was in vain, and his love turned on the instant to perfect madness of hatred, as it is apt to do in a bad heart, and the malignance of his feelings soon showed him the way to torture her.

He found out that the secret terror of her life was that her husband would be arrested. Jonathan grinned like a very demon to himself as he saw a way to avenge his fancied wrongs upon the helpless woman; to avenge his wrongs, and to spread the vengeance over all her life.

He assured her that he would himself denounce Derwent for the manslaughter unless she handed him the exact half of her little earnings, won through close hard work at her lace-pillow.

Poor soft soul, she had never thought of investigating Jonathan's story; she had only shrunk too sensitively from the details of the supposed murder; whereas had she been shrewd enough to seek for the dead man she would have discovered the fraud and saved herself from all the tragedy of her nineteen years of separation.

She had parted from Otto, despising his cowardice, his callous abandonment of her without one farewell, and his base sacrifice of her whom he had sworn to love and cherish through bad and good; but she could not quite crush back her anguish at the thought of having him dragged from his proud

English home, and forced to expiate his terrible blunder in perhaps life-long imprisonment.

She knew well that Jonathan was quite cruel enough to do what he threatened, and she bent her back only too eagerly under the crushing burden he placed upon it.

Jonathan returned to his dreary home in Addiscombe, a moody, dark-humored man, who could not look honest folk in the face, but repelled every soul who ventured near him, until not a neighbor ever stepped inside his gloomy door, and who abused his infirm old sister Patty, until she was obliged to leave him, and totter down her declining years in loneliness and indigence, so that the time came when she wept salt tears of vain regret that she had ever put anything in the way of his marrying poor, pretty, good Ada Rivers, who would have made, oh, such a difference in these brother and sister's lives.

And in this utter isolation Jonathan was able to receive the miserable wringings of Mrs. Derwent's very life, the half of her tiny, tiny winnings; he, the rich farmer, with enough and to spare to support a large family.

And so devilish was the man's nature that he used to gloat over these few coins with explosions of half-crazy laughter in the silence and desolation of his empty home, so that the neighbors, hurrying by, soon convinced each other that Jonathan Brade was mad.

It seemed such a rich joke to him; oh, wasn't he serving the proud minx out for her insolence in rejecting him?

Wasn't he fooling her?

And this was where the half of all that Monica and her mother could earn, had gone all these years—as hush-money to keep the husband who had abandoned her safe out of prison.

Ah, pure, faithful heart that could not condone crime, and yet could die by inches in the unsuspected service of the criminal, was it not a bitter fate that your sweetness and your youthful beauty brought upon you?

But no man could live in such a pit of loathsome baseness and remain a man. Jonathan Brade got more and more wicked as the years went on, until he committed a crime which the law clutched him for, and so he came in contact with Messrs. Korner and Price, and then fell mortally ill in the Tombs, New York; and so made his confession, and they began to try to lift the ban off the long-oppressed Mrs. Derwent.

The one thing Jonathan purposely held back was the whereabouts of his victim. He had no will, even on his death-bed, that she should benefit by his enforced confession, and he died with the secret unbroken, consequently the lawyers were obliged to advertise as we have seen.

Yes, Jonathan Brade, the wicked marplot of Ada Rivers's life, died impenitent six months before his victim died, and to the end she never learned the truth.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A RAT IN THE TRAP.

ON the evening of that same day, Geoffrey and Mr. Price were back at Toby's cottage, telling Monica the details of their fruitless investigations.

"They did not go near the railway station at Linne," said Geoffrey, "but were seen on the Kamp Road; at least a close carriage drawn by two thoroughbreds which some peasants swear to belong to my uncle's stables, was seen at dawn this morning slowly going along the Kamp Road, toward Millverton, a railway station twenty miles south. I telegraphed, and received the answer that no such party had arrived there. I have come back to do what I should have done at first, only I feared he would deceive us—to wring the truth out of Vulpino."

"Will he tell it?" shuddered Monica.

"He must! He is in my power, at my mercy—he must!" reiterated her cousin, grimly.

And he galloped off, attended by the stalwart Toby, who had paid one visit already to the ill-favored captive, for the purpose of fetching him such coarse food as he thought he deserved.

"An' the devil himself couldn't ramp an' tear more vicious," recorded Toby, with an enjoyable grin, as he tramped by the bridle of Master Geoffrey's palfrey; "he had most fied through that there dog-chain on the bricks, an' would ha' bin off in another hour. Lord! one 'ud think he hed the Bank o' England at his fingers' ends, by his offers." And the stanch old fellow chuckled at the reminiscence of certain smart transactions of his with the captive, in which he had "done" him rather brown by accepting a handful of sovereigns with the utmost suavity, and then loftily repudiating the insulting idea that he ought to *earn* them by betraying his trust; Toby being of that popular opinion that it was always right to "spoil the Philistines."

Arriving at the scene of Monica's sufferings, they came upon the lank, tawny Italian, asleep in his bonds, from sheer exhaustion. He was no pleasant sight in his haggard sleep, his clothing torn and dusty, where he had violently rolled himself about the bare floor, and the ugly distortion of pain and rage still on his pale and sweat-glistening features.

As the two men stepped into the room, they had time to observe this picture, before Vulpino started up with a snarling cry, and sitting on the floor, glared at Geoffrey with far more of menace than entreaty.

"Ebbene—have you a-come-a to mock me in dese bonds?" he ground out.

"On the contrary," said Geoffrey, "I have come to offer you freedom, and a chance to expiate the injuries you have done my uncle and Miss Rivers. It entirely depends on yourself whether you leave this place with us, or are left to endure a half-starved solitude until I have the time to punish you. And

I warn you that your punishment will be as thorough as your monstrous crime deserves."

The evil eyes probed Geoffrey's inflexible face, and a sickly pallor overspread his own. He dropped his head and meditated with himself for some moments in silence. At last he said:

"Dere is no alternatiff; I submit. W'at you expect-a of me?"

"The truth," answered Geoffrey; "and after it, your co-operation in saving the life of my uncle, if he be yet alive. Are you willing to purchase your freedom on these terms?"

"Dere is no help; I must," muttered the prisoner, doggedly; "but w'at dese fools about dat dey do not search-a fore me—rescue me!"

"That doesn't sound as if they were far off," whispered the keen young lawyer in Geoffrey's ear. "No," said Geoffrey, "if he means the Marshalls."

He turned on Vulpino with a threatening intensity. "You must assist us to save Mr. Derwent from the conspirators who want to take his life," he said. "And first, tell us, where have they taken him?"

Vulpino tossed his chin in the air with an irrepressible grin of wily triumph.

"Und you suspect-a notsing? Ha! ha! ha! Vulpino plans well. Bote—bote—ze time have come-a to speak; dere is no help. Your signore, the Maestro of Derwent-a Weald is now in his own castle; he was never taken out of it."

"What!" cried Geoffrey, astonished; "was that coach only a blind?"

"Only a blind!" admitted Vulpino. "Ze signore is at dis moment hidden in ze old tower of ze castle, wis his three attendants, ze bloodthirsty brothers, and ze beautiful leetle Jezebel, Signorina Godiva. He no more sick dan I, bote dey makes him t'ink he dying; an' so he weel, vera, vera queek, 'less I am back dere to save-a him."

"Price, off with you and verify this rogue's statement; it will be the worse for him if he has lied to us. Vulpino, tell him how to obtain ingress."

"Dat he cannot; not widout me," maintained the Italian, grimly. "Nobody is expected bote Vulpino, and nobody except Vulpino will enter. Take-a me weeth; und den—"

"And then you will betray us into the hands of your accomplices! No, thank you!" cried Price, shrugging his shoulders. "Come, old chap, you mustn't take us for idiots; be merciful to your own hide and play fair. Meantime, while you are making up your mind to the unaccustomed agony of telling the truth, I shall amuse myself going through your pockets, hoping to come across a key or two that may be useful."

Mr. Price was as good as his word, and in spite of the crestfallen Italian's gnashings of teeth and baleful glares, thrust his nimble hands into every pocket about the captive, producing several of the large brazen keys of the Weald for his trouble.

Vulpino saw that he was helpless, and made up his mind to turn his coat.

"Dere is no use," he said to Geoffrey, sullenly, "I go over on your side. Only you promise me dat I go free venever your uncle be restored to you."

"That I promise solemnly," said Geoffrey; "but he must be restored, both in body and in health, else I hold you responsible."

"Ha! dat makes a deerferent story, muttered Vulpino, uneasily, "dey hev ze medicines, und are so—so impatient—and I haf note been dere—he may be dead." Geoffrey uttered a cry.—"Bote no," Vulpino went on, anxiously enough, now that his own life was imperiled; "dey must be waiting for me; dey were afraid to leave traces; gentlemen, I must go to ze Weald if you wants ze life save, I must go at once. I promise you fidelity, w'at else can I—? Come weeth me, dat you may do; I swear fair play."

There was no time to be lost, and no other way. Geoffrey agreed to trust the Italian, who, indeed, had no interest in betraying them since his accomplices could no longer work in the dark, and certainly dared not work in the light.

Relieving him of his weapons, then of his bonds, and refreshing him with a hearty pull at Mr. Price's capacious pocket-flash, the three set off for the Weald, which they reached about ten of the night.

Cautiously picketing the horse and gig out of hearing, the trio went through one of the archways, the gate of which Vulpino unlocked with one of the keys, and then they stole into the inner court, and he showed them a dim light glimmering far up in an ancient round tower, whose ruined walls overtopped the rest of the pile by a hundred feet.

"Dere lies ze signore," whispered the Italian, his eyes lightning up strangely, "nursed by ze lovely Mees Montacute. By ze secret stair, w'ich winds like ze corkscrew round und round in ze interior of ze fifteen-feet thick wall, we s'all mount ze ruined tower und see ze master unsuspect. Come."

They followed him into the pitch-dark aperture, and up the giddy wind of broken and dust-choked steps. Arrived at last on a tiny triangular landing, he arrested them by a touch, and softly drew back a shutter, revealing a narrow slit-window, which, however, commanded a view of the interior instead of the exterior.

The three were now looking down into a small, octagonal chamber, whose occupants were the master of Dornoch-Weald, lying white and motionless upon a bed, and Godiva Montacute, fair and lovely, sitting by him, half shrouded by the faded brocade curtain, with her head down on the little table, either asleep or brooding.

"Thank God," whispered Geoffrey involuntarily, "he is yet alive;" and he pored over the domestic tableau, scarcely able to realize its sinister reality.

"And where may the two men be?" whispered Price.

"Oh, dey do not shut demselves up in dis gloomy place-a, except to take turns in ze watch," returned Vulpino; "dey leef in ze best rooms in ze house, an' dey drinks ze wines for amusement. Ze prettv

signorina, she know notsing bote dat ze oncle must be hid from strangers in his dog-madness."

Vulpino, however, was wrong here, as Geoffrey took care to whisper to Price, whose admiring gaze was fastened to that lovely false face with rather a perilous ardor.

Godiva Montacute was just as guilty as the brothers, and shared all their secrets. Monica had told him of her interview with Jasper in the woods. The three descended to the courtyard to hold counsel. It had been Geoffrey's first and natural intention to rush openly to the rescue of his uncle and the punishment of his enemies, but another idea had occurred to him since Vulpino's enforced alliance.

As yet the conspirators had not actually done anything which would give him a hold on them; and the closer he looked into their schemes the more monstrous they showed, and the more worthy of a full and terrible expiation. Would it not be possible to manage matters so that he could leave them to execute the full measure of their villainy, or to suppose that they had done so, he meantime preserving his uncle's life; and then, catching them red-handed, punish them according to their intentions?

A very short discussion, into which the wily Italian interjected some of his natural craft and intrigue, decided Geoffrey to have recourse to stratagem, to trap the conspirators into showing their game in its entirety. Vulpino proposed to disguise Geoffrey so completely that he could brave the closest inspection, and making the excuse that the close of Mr. Derwent's illness (which was caused altogether by the poison he had been giving him) would be too painful to be watched by Miss Montacute or the brothers, present him in the character of a nurse from Kondon, one of his own confidential tools who would conduct the final tragedy.

The result of these conferences was, that Geoffrey hid him to one of the ancient armories which stood in all its carven splendor in a forgotten gallery, and shortly afterward emerged, clad in an obsolete suit of olive green livery, padded and shaped to represent the form of an awkward, obese old fellow, his well-dyed face almost covered with terrier-like whiskers and beard, and a pair of bristling pepper-and-salt eyebrows shading the youthful flash of his dark eyes.

What with this disguise, a cleverly acted infirmity of gait, and a high, wheezing voice, Geoffrey might have defied the recognition of his own mother had she been alive to gaze at him.

Vulpino looked him over sharply, grinned tacit approval, and casting aside all care and caution, boldly clamped with him through the echoing corridors to the luxurious suite of apartments in which the brothers were wiling away the time of waiting for a dead man's shoes, by the aid of occasional billiards and spirituous consolations unlimited.

Upon the Italian's appearance there rose a cry of inquiry at his protracted absence, and of astonishment at his companion.

"It is right—all a-right, signori," declared Vulpino, clapping his bony claw on Geoffrey's shoulder as he spoke; "thees is an assistant moche needed; I 'av' sent-a ze London for him, because he was require. Ze end weel be—ah, you weel not want to see it—but he—'tis notsing to Meester Barber, eh, amico?" and he leered confidentially at his pretended assistant, who affected a taciturn habit, and merely nodded, grunting in reply.

A few more explanations served to satisfy the brothers that all was right, and then they asked, with lowered tones and uneasily shifting eyes, *what of the girl?*

A quick shrug of the shoulder, a grimace, and a faint smile, convinced them that Vulpino had disposed of Miss Rivers, *alias* Derwent, the new-found daughter and heiress, according to agreement; they both turned frightfully pale, and fell dead silent for some time.

"Well, what's done can't be undone," muttered Rufus at last, as if in answer to some mental compunction; "you're sure it is well concealed?"

"Ze body, you mean? Si, si, w'at else! Ahime! una bella donna—pretty creature she was, too, ah! ah!" lamented the Italian.

"And *him*—how long?" faltered Rufus, averting his ghastly face, and vainly trying to clear the nervous huskiness out of his craven tones.

"Vera queek; bote Barber, he must be sole nurse now," said Vulpino; "as for ze sweet donna Godiva, w'at she doing in dat fearful presence? Pore cheeld, w'y blast her memory wees such agonies?"

"You were so long gone, we had to let her relieve us," mumbled Gavaine the burly, whose muscular body represented all the strength and courage he possessed, his soul quaking miserably at every danger or painful sight.

"Barber weel now relieve her," announced Vulpino, calmly; "he has his instructions. He and I weel do all now. As fore you three, I say, *go away* from zis place, hide you some-a-w'ere, dat you can prove *alibi*, eh, in case of t'ings onexpect happenin'?"

The craven pair eagerly leaped at this chance for shirking the distressful phases of the crime they were yet cruel enough to consummate; and at once made preparations for running over to Paris, there to go through the farce of nursing a bogus Mr. Derwent, of having him die, and of taking the sealed remains back to Dornoch.

To Geoffrey's surprise and displeasure, Vulpino decreed that Godiva should remain in the castle, pouring forth a voluble list of wherefores, not one of which could hold water when analyzed.

"What, in Heaven's name, can he be at?" uneasily wondered Geoffrey, when he went down to the court-yard in the gray of dawn to report progress to young Price, who was his go-between to Monica.

"Don't ye see?" grinned the omniscient lawyer; "he's in love with the large, soft-furred, sharp-claw-

ed white cat, and can't endure the agony of parting from her."

"Nonsense! Why, she shudders at him. I saw her do it once to-night when he asked to feel her pulse, fearing she had watched too long."

"And that only whets his passions," returned Price, chuckling; "and he'll win her, too, in spite of all her shudderings and shakings of her dainty paws; and yet, there are men who don't believe in retributive justice!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR IS HARD."

Rufus and Gavaine Marshall supposed themselves to be murderers, and Vulpino the Italian to be their accomplice and instrument. They believed that the new-found daughter of Otto Derwent had perished of starvation by their command; and that Otto Derwent was dying by their command—their command as executed by Vulpino.

The natural consequence was that at present Vulpino was master, and they his slaves; and what he prescribed they perforce must do, be it obvious in its intention, like his ordering them off to Paris during the death-agony of Derwent, that in case of the worst they might be able to prove an alibi, or inscrutable and vexatious, like his fiat that Godiva should remain at the Weald.

Rufus, hopelessly in love with her, despite the somber guilt in which they both were wading neck deep, felt the world doubly watchful and glaring when thrust into it without her brave, clever front to disarm antagonism and dissipate suspicion; then again the man had kissed her lovely false mouth as a lover kisses, and the poison of her spell was in his blood.

It was more terrible to him to part from her than to contemplate the torturing death of Monica—and this last contemplation sometimes well-nigh overwhelmed him with terror, pity, and remorse.

But Vulpino, who knew all—who could bring destruction down about their ears with a whisper—he had ordained that the lovers must part for the present; Rufus dared not disobey.

As for Gavaine, his coarse nature, which would have carried him through any scene of brute violence, quailed and cowered in abject fear and foreboding before the half-veiled tragedy which was being stealthily worked at the command of himself and his brother; like most brainless colossals, he was superstitious; and during this season of horrible intentions and cautious workings of them out, he never slept but to see strange visions, coarsely shocking as depicted by his beast-imagination; or walked but to loiter about the ruined chambers, eaten up of peevish discontent and ennui, and nervously afraid of every sound or sight that obtruded upon his miserable moods.

Of course he plunged into such comfort as seas of wine and brandy could give him, stupefied his already clouded senses, and only wished he could get dead drunk enough to sleep over the climax of the dreadful plot which was to make his fortune, only awaking to find the grass on those two graves green—all the buzz of rumor over, and a soft, silver-lined nest waiting him to step therein.

Vulpino received a maudlin glance of gratitude from Mr. Gavaine's moist dull eyes as he issued his command—Gavaine would have journeyed cheerfully to Iceland to escape the grim vigils he and his brother had been keeping over their victim. And then, he was not in love with Godiva Montacute, on the contrary, he sometimes almost hated her, suspecting dimly, as dull men will, that she was ridiculing him, yet not quite able to credit such sacrilege, considering what a killing fellow he was, and how strong of body, and handsome!

He never could have comprehended the fierce disgust and disdain of that proud, erring heart, not only at himself, as an animal too foul and bestial to touch save with a long pole—but at his brother, the wily Rufus, whom Gavaine firmly believed to be the most invincible, cunning and talented rogue in the three kingdoms.

Godiva, carried away by the whirlwind of passion against Geoffrey, who had refused to do her the homage of offering her his hand and heart—had joined herself with his enemies—had pledged herself to reward their crimes by marrying Rufus; and now her heart was sick, and her brain reeled in the near view of her doom. She never heard the cautious footstep of her lover climbing the winding stairway of the ancient tower, to join her by the sick man's bed, without a dark, dark scowl; his clasping hands, they made her flesh creep out from beneath their loathed touch; his eager eyes that smiled love into her own even over the death-bed of his and her benefactor, whom they two had sworn to do to the death; his burning eyes, that always looked their best when resting upon her—she shrunk from, and snatched hers away from the compliment of meeting them, and her heart would stand still, and her body grow rigid, her veins fill with ice; and dared he kiss her lips, as he had a right to do, she not venturing to withstand him, a fierce blaze would flash out from her whole being, as it were, and she would tremble a little, growing very pale; and at such times, while the purblind lover was gloating over all these maiden manifestations of his power, and accounting for them of course by contraries, her glance would flicker off to the knife glistening on the invalid's tray, or to the poison vials on the commode, and then she would wrench herself back to the inevitable present, and enact the *fiancée*.

And when Vulpino came to her, announcing the proposed departure of the brothers, and formally requesting her to remain as the hostess of himself and his man Barber, her beautiful, jewel-like eyes flashed up one involuntary gleam of relief, which left the Italian panting and pale, and she sunk deeper into the down-cushioned chair with a great sigh of rest and peace.

Barber could not help turning long, sorrowful, half-credulous looks upon the young lady who had developed such fearful qualities. For many of their childish years these two had lived together; and, although Geoffrey had never in the least cherished a romantic affection for Godiva, he had warmly admired her beauty, spirit, and wit; believing, as all true-hearted men do, that his girl comrade was far beyond him in goodness and purity. Of late years he had not seen her often, and upon the occasion of his recent meeting with her under the oaks of his uncle's Weald, she had puzzled and offended him; first, by the sickly softness of her manner, which he little suspected to be a trap to catch his love; and next, by a something hard and coarsely shrewd in her counsel to him to outwit the new favorites of his uncle for sake of that uncle's wealth. Monica's horrible revelations of Godiva's complicity in the brothers' plots, had dashed his old-time comrade forever from her pedestal; but yet, seeing her again in all her rich and flawless beauty, with power seated on her noble forehead, genuine sensibility shining from her eyes, and all grace and delicacy expressed in attire and attitude, it seemed perfectly incredible that she could scheme murder, and patiently work the lingering tragedy out.

What! To women droop over the men they mean to kill, with gentle hands ready to minister to their comfort, and listening ear bent to catch the labored breath, as Godiva is doing over Mr. Derwent at this very moment? Could she actually sit hour by hour by his pillow, rendering him all the pitiful services which proud man's extremity calls for from woman, the ministering angel since the world began? Could she hear his faint, delirious babble about all that had gone to make up his life, his friends, his political opinions, his houses, domains, and favorite horses—ay, his loves, too, that long-lost and dead Ada, who had exhausted the fountain of his love-love, and then proved false as Jezebel;—Geoffrey, gallant, merry Geoffrey, brave Geoffrey, who, of all the world, was the only one worthy to wear the name and own the lands of a Derwent;—yes, and even her own name was murmured, wistfully, inquiringly, with sighs at the something incomprehensible which warned him not to trust her—with low-spoken, shamed blame of her unwomanly boldness in declaring her love for himself unasked—yet always with gentle, protecting care for her welfare;—could Godiva Montacute sit by, hearing all this, and still cherish the hope of his speedy death at the hands of herself and her accomplices?

True-hearted Geoffrey felt sick at the monstrous thought.

He told himself that it would be the kindest, most merciful thing a friend of this wretched girl's could do, to slay her as she sat, ere she had imbrued those white girlish hands in the blood of her benefactor; ere she had steeped her maiden soul in the red murder-tide, which all the fires in hell might not burn clean again.

All the night Godiva had not opened her mouth to speak, after her first quiet greeting to the Italian, and a slight bend of the head to his companion upon his introduction. She had listened in silence to the commands of Vulpino concerning a change of drugs, as he gathered up all the horrid paraphernalia of his poisoning systems and replaced them with strong antidotes and tonics; and she had looked her relief and delight when she heard that the brothers were to leave the Weald. But for the most part she kept her head bent over the sick man's pillow and her great gloomy eyes fastened on his ghastly face, scarcely seeming to breathe, and yet so intensely alive to every faint breath of his, or quiver of the relaxed muscles, that when he suddenly opened his eyes and fixed them solemnly upon hers, she uttered a gasp, as one suddenly plunged into icy waters—and made a strange, passionate movement toward him as if she would embrace him—then drew back, trembling from head to foot, and casting a wild glance of appeal toward the man whom Vulpino had brought to conduct her victim through the last dread stage of his death-journey.

Vulpino was absent; he was engaged in hurrying the brothers off to France; he dared not trust the love-sick Rufus out of his sight until he had him aboard the morning train for Dover.

Geoffrey *alias* Barber, stepped at once to the bedside, and anxiously gazed into his uncle's dim and glaring eyes.

With what a pang of the true and tender heart did he witness the quick flinching of those once haughty eyes, now strained and blood-shot by the paroxysms of physical agony through which the helpless frame had passed.

Derwent evidently knew too well the fate ordained for him, and felt nothing but fresh dismay at the appearance of a stranger, permitted by that cold and cruel woman, whose vengeance he had purchased three years ago, when he rejected her love.

Geoffrey's disguise was too complete for his uncle to penetrate, and after a quiet examining glance over the truculent-looking head, and at the brown hands, he turned his head away with a perceptible shudder, and a faint disdaining smile.

Here was another executioner added to the quartette—probably the one delegated to give him the *coup de grace*—why degrade speech by using it to cry for mercy at such hands?

Poor Geoffrey, in his pity and anger, forgot everything but that here was his dear, hot-hearted, proud and imbibed kinsman lying a-dying through the treachery of those for whose sakes he had cast them off, and turning even now, with scorn and aversion from him, who would with cheerfulness have laid down his own gallant young life to save him; he uttered a sort of dumb cry of grief and remonstrance, and flung himself on the prostrate form, meaning to clasp him up to his breast, and to assure him in language which he *must* believe that he could and would rescue him from these wretches who had be-

trayed him, and that he had never done anything to forfeit his love, and was worthy to serve him now and always.

But Derwent, never dreaming of the presence of a friend in this stranger, supposed the worst; and, enfeebled though he was, all the proud blood of the ancient race he came of boiled up at what he supposed to be a dastardly attack; and, with a shout like a general on the battlefield, he leaped up to his knees in the bed, and, his spectral face flashing princely wrath and contempt, his shriveled hands up in a noble fencing attitude, he held his supposed adversary at bay right gallantly.

Godiva, believing the end at hand, stood a moment, shrieking and shrinking, mad with fear that her victim's blood was to flow in her presence; then she darted out at the door, and into her room—chosen like the rest in the ruined part of the mansion, for better concealment of her presence at the Weald; and here she dropped on her knees beside her bed cramming the antique, musk-smelling coverlet of embroidered silk into her mouth to choke her cries of ungovernable horror—yet steeling her wicked heart—yes, in the very midst of its natural anguish steeling it against the clamorings of her heart to go and save her benefactor even yet—or to die with him.

Her cries brought Rufus, whose ear was ever open to hear her voice—brought him running from the room where he and Gavaine were eating a traveler's breakfast—to hammer urgently on her door, imploring her "for God's sake to say what was the matter—was Derwent—had the new man—" etc., etc.; nothing but incoherencies coming from his whitened lips, after all.

Godiva let him knock and let him implore, while she fought down her terrible agitation, and reasoned that if Derwent really was *gone*, now there would be no going away of the brothers, no respite from this hideous love-making—nothing but riveted chains henceforth; also, that if she gave no satisfactory excuse for her cries, Rufus would obstinately stand there at her door until she went to him and calmed his love-sick soul and rewarded his solicitude with an amorous interview; so she swept up her wonderful tawny mane with one fierce clenched hand, skewering it with a long sharp steel arrow which she unconsciously thrust through the delicate skin of her scalp, never feeling the wound in her wild excitement; then, seeing in her mirror how hard her face had grown, and how glaring and evil her eyes, she tossed a flossy white illusion scarf over her head, drawing it about her pale haggard cheeks, so as to soften their rigid lines; and so unlocked her door, and keeping it so that her lover could not clasp her, peeped out at him with a faint, reassuring smile.

"Forgive me for startling you, dear," she said, kindly; "I believe I've sat looking at him too long. I feel all unstrung—nervous—hysterical. He woke and looked at me, and—and—I could not bear it—" she could not press back the convulsive sob here, for oh, his eyes had looked into hers so solemnly, so appealingly; and—*oh God! was he dead now—dead?*

"Poor love!" faltered Rufus, anguish in his heart, for he truly loved this ill-fated woman who had come to him through crime—and what man, howsoever wicked, can endure the sight of her sweet hands, soiled with guilt? "Poor love, would to God I had kept all this from you—would to God I had gone through it alone, or—never thought of it at all—"

"Don't! Don't say that!" she cried, with sudden shrill despair, for was it not too late—eternally fixed—no drawing back any more—and to whisper compunction now?—"if you want to kill me, or craze me, talk of repentance now. Oh! Oh!" She went back into her room in a wild way, trying to check the cries of agony which would burst from her betrayed soul; for it is not true that men and women who have head to reason and heart to feel can sin without remorseful anguish; it must be a semi-idiot who could; and especially to plot deliberate murder—a double murder, as had been done; oh, poor, quivering, anguished soul of doomed Godiva, why were your throes not enough to soften that adamant will of hers, which even now could not bring itself to accept defeat, express contrition, and welcome retribution and expiation?

Rufus, carried out of himself by her vehemence, her distress, and the near sorrow of separation for a time, ventured in after her, and catching her in the center of the room, encircled her writhing form with his eager arms, and sought to press her head to his breast; but she thrust him from her fiercely, crying out words that pierced his very soul with grief and terror.

"Out of my sight, *murderer!*" she raved, prudence, calculation, all forgotten save the flame which was consuming her; "it matters nothing that I am as guilty as you—do I not abhor myself?—ah! I could tear my own vile heart out with these hands, and trample down its hateful throbbings! And you expect me to love you—you, the low hound, the cur, who could work upon a poor, proud-spirited girl's evil passions to win yourself wealth—who could—"

She stopped; Vulpino was on the threshold, his black eyes glimmering green with jealousy and daring exultation; he had heard her last bitter words; and Rufus's convulsed countenance corroborated the sincerity of her denunciation; but he quickly commanded himself, stepped up to Rufus, and whispered in his ear with a friendly look:

"Foolish lover, do you not-a see dat yore donna amica is distract, dat you oppress her weeth love-makings now? Leave her weeth no addio; she weel sigh fore you to-morrow, repenting of her cruelties to-day. Away weeth you, brave amico." And he gently pulled the reluctant swain from the lady's room, softly closing the door upon her hysterical sobs and moans.

Five minutes afterward she heard the grinding of wheels on the stones below, and hurrying to look

down, saw the brothers driving away with a couple of valises strapped to the back of the fly.

"And that's the last of you," she muttered, laughing wildly.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT LAST!

MEANWHILE uncle and nephew had surmounted all mystifications, and were holding each other tightly by the hand, and pouring forth their pent-up hearts as men so seldom do to each other, preferring the soft sympathy of emotional womankind, which does not criticise or smile at a man's loving weakness.

But these two had always loved each other dearly, noble heart responding to noble heart; and this rare and perfect love it was which had so imbibed them one against the other, when each suspected treachery in the other—"What! have I been deceived in him all along, and is his love of me of a baser quality than mine? Ah! how he must have been laughing at my foolish tenderness, the *devil incarnate!*" For outraged love makes fiercest hate, and the torn heart strives to see the traitor henceforth in his blackest colors, as some bitter indemnity for the precious treasure heretofore wasted upon him.

"Uncle, look at me, your own miserable boy!" cried Geoffrey, tearing at his false outside in the frantic endeavor to show his uncle the dear reality beneath. "I'm Geoffrey, your own poor, broken-hearted boy, come back to you, dear, I hope—I hope in time to save you from these fiends!" And he stopped in the middle of the work of destruction, stopped perforce, for the man who had driven him forth in his vain and empty pride of race, to take to his bosom in his stead a brood of loathsome reptiles who had well-nigh stung him to death, had dropped his warlike attitude, and, with a strange cry, had fallen forward on his breast, arms clinging round his neck, face pressed down close, close upon his heart, sobbing and shaking like a loving girl; the haughty Derwent all unmanned, cowering for shelter, weeping for love and remorse, in the faithful arms of his disinherited nephew.

And the men were smitten dumb with great emotion. Each forgot the outer hardness due his manhood, and let the other run deep into his long-yearning and bereaved heart. The old man had been brought so low that this womanish fit—no fool could presume to hint that it disgraced him; while the young man was so strong and fearless in his will to rescue him, and so pitiful of his sufferings, that these falling tears, and manly lips pressed to the thin cheek of the sick man, and panting grief and fury, only proved him nobler, braver, kinder and kinglier, than any man had ever been before him, except, perhaps, the knights like Sir Galahad of the Holy Graal, or King Arthur himself, blameless and brave.

But, after a long while, Derwent drew back from his nephew, and sinking upon his pillows, fixed his eyes upon him with a mournful smile.

"My poor injured boy," he said, so weak was his voice that Geoffrey was terrified, and looked wildly about for some restorative, "I need not ask your noble heart if it can forgive my cruelty and folly, for you have come to me in my desperate extremity, and love that had never been outraged could do no more. And, brave Geoffrey, if it can soften the hard harshness of the past, let me solemnly assure you that, black-hearted, false and evil-liver as I believed you to be, I never succeeded in driving you quite out of my love; I pined for you, Geoffrey, Geoffrey! There were hours of isolation and loneliness when my whole soul cried out for you, whatever you had done—when I was lashed with remorseful forebodings that I had thrust you further along the road to destruction than your own vices had done—when life seemed heavy and aimless, hideous to look back upon, maddening to look forward to—and I could have welcomed death. And these demons worked upon all that was bad or weak in me—oh, fool! fool! to stifle the warnings of my instinct and accept filth for the precious metal I had cast away!"

"Oh, now, hang it all! what's the use of raking things up?" exclaimed Geoffrey, getting in his oar at last, and desperately hasting his uncle out of these waters of humiliation and self-reproach; "I never was the muf to harbor malice, and I dare say was provoking enough about the little jade, Nell Wyvern, who surely was never worth the trouble she put between you and me, dear old man. And that reminds me to say that I never cared for her, really, you know, though I thought it *would* be a rascal's act to desert her at your bid, and not worthy a Derwent of the old stock, for all she was a poor girl."

Geoffrey paused in the full flow of his confessions, suddenly becoming aware, by the dark blood which tinged his uncle's pallid cheek that he was upon awkward ground, and for a moment looked foolish enough, pulling his mustache and glowering at Derwent deprecatingly.

He had quite forgotten Derwent's early marriage with the American village girl, and subsequent desertion of her. As yet, he knew none of the particulars of the matter, not having seen Monica since she had read Jonathan Brade's confession; he only knew that his uncle had deserted Monica's mother, although she was his lawful wife, and that Monica's mission to England had been to avenge her mother's wrongs.

Derwent waved his pale hand after a dead silence, to bespeak Geoffrey's attention.

"I see, by your significant interruption of your story, and your embarrassment, that you have become acquainted with my marriage. Did Monica tell you?" He faltered a little as he pronounced her name, and averted his face uneasily; he, too, was in the dark concerning his long-lost wife, and knew not that she was innocent and dead, and that Monica was all that was left him of her—his daughter.

"Yes, uncle; Monica told me," said Geoffrey, recovering himself in the welcome prospect of championizing the lovely American, and instantly brimming over with eager intelligence; "and if you only knew all that sweet lady has braved, ay, and suffered, in her efforts to save you, you would take her straight into your heart and worship her forever!"

"As my dear Geoffrey has done!" said Derwent, looking at him wistfully; "yes, she is very attractive, and strangely courageous in her attempts to make acquaintance with me; and I do think she interfered in my defense that dreadful day in the wood, when Rufus sent the mad dog at me; but *why* is she so interested? *Who* is she? My boy, I knew one Rivers before, she—was unworthy—"

"No! no! that is impossible!" Geoffrey broke in, feeling it unendurable to hear *Monica's* mother so described; but his uncle, supposing him merely to be echoing the statements of a mercenary relative of his perfidious wife, only shook his head sadly and continued:

"She was unworthy, Geoffrey; she wrecked my life when it was at its very prime; and she *seemed* as softly innocent and radiantly good as this young girl, who is, of course, some relative of hers, sent here by—*her*—to make money out of the secret marriage, which she probably supposes I have kept secret from far different motives than the real ones."

"Uncle! I can't hear you speak of that angel so!" almost shouted Geoffrey, springing to his feet, and towering up in the middle of the floor with clenched fists and panting nostrils, so hot was he in his idol's defense; then, catching his uncle's wan look of distress and perplexity, and recollecting how much fuller and more perfect would the reunion be between father and daughter if he refrained from any disclosures now, and brought his angelic Monica to tell the tale herself, he crushed down his excitement, lifted his uncle's wasted hand to his lips with a beautiful humble and loving grace, and said, gently:

"Dear old man, forgive my violence. I have only this excuse, that, when, you know all that I know about that sweet American queen, you will love me better still for standing up for her thus. Many things have happened, uncle, that you don't know—when you do, you will never rest until—but, never mind; I drop the subject for the present; and indeed I have most culpably neglected your comfort of mind and body, in my ill-regulated zeal. Dear Nunc, don't look at me with that heart-sick expression, as if you saw me in the horrid clutches of a Yankee sorceress. Suspend all judgment until you have heard this lady's story. Will you not promise to do this?"

"Ah, my generous, unsuspecting boy, what power have you to stand the lures and wiles of a scheming woman?" sighed Derwent, almost revoking all the kindly half-belief he had begun to cherish secretly in the young girl who had hung over him with her very soul standing in her eyes, and anguish clearly written on her front, when he lay, struck down by his heirs; for Derwent was a man born of, and nurtured by a race made proud by centuries of distinction and honors conferred by the mighty of the land, in just award for its unblemished name and gallant services rendered to the king and country.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TWISTING THE TOILS.

The blood of the Derwent was old before the Norman Conquest, and from its remotest annals not a generation had passed without producing at least one scion of the house whose deeds could be fitly strung upon the glittering rosary of valor and worth which wound its dazzling way through scores of mammoth tomes, written in rude Latin by the friars of the house, centuries ago; and later, in Chaucer's English; later still, in Johnson's sounding diction; and now, in the smooth, flowing phraseology of the present day, written by the scholarly young Etonian who filled the post of secretary to the master of Dornoch-Weald. In this, the latest volume of the History of the House of Derwent, two of the broad leaves were sealed together, and jealously stamped with the seal of the house, with the menacing motto:

"DARE NOT DERWENT."

These pages were written by the hand of Otto, the only surviving Derwent of the line, and no eye had as yet ever scanned them save his own.

They recounted the tragedy of his unwise and unworthy marriage.

The rest of his career, as chronicled in the open pages, was proud and brilliant as befitted the descendant of such ancestors. He had fought with signal gallantry and victory for his country; he had served her nobly with his intellect in his chair among the statesmen; he was a power in the land.

He had never stooped from his lofty pedestal of honor and a pure life, and had done noble good with his wealth; after all, had he not more rational cause for self-esteem than have the common herd, who, uninfluenced by the lives of more heroic natures as exemplified in their ancestors, lives as they may, according to their own dull capacities?

Granting this aspect of affairs as reasonable excuse for Derwent's conservatism, what more natural, nay, inevitable, than his shrinking reluctance to condemn himself in the eyes of his compeers by publication of his early *mesalliance*, after all that was sweet belonging to it had vanished, leaving only the blasting disgrace; or what more consistent than his shocked repulsion of the idea of his beloved Geoffrey's entanglement with a nobody like pretty Nell Wyvern; or an American siren, soiled by the blood of the traitor Rivers—like Monica, the mercenary agent of his vile wife Ada, whom he had always pictured for these nineteen years of sullen, dumb fury, in the home of his ignoble rival, Jonathan Brade, growing further and further out of his toleration in the conscious guilt of her situation?

So he maligned the strange, sweet American

maiden whom Geoffrey revered above all women by the names of "siren" and "schemer," and almost forgot her devotion to himself in the bitter pain it gave him to see how Geoffrey shrunk and flushed from the scornful epithets.

But Geoffrey was wise; he resolutely changed the theme of discourse, leaving that mighty question in abeyance.

He quietly and quickly explained the present state of matters; Vulpino had been bought over to undo the mischief he had done; the Marshalls were hurrying away from the Weald in anticipation of his speedy death; Godiva was being held, Geoffrey explained, most likely as a sort of hostage for their return; and then he told of Monica's sufferings.

"Great heavens!" gasped Derwent, who had hung on Geoffrey's words with breathless attention from the moment when Monica's name was introduced; "and she went through all that for me! For me, Geoffrey—I who have never spared her one kindly word! Oh, who is she?" he almost shouted.

Geoffrey told of her lying helpless in Toby's hut, consumed with anxiety on her uncle's account.

"When—can—she—come?" gasped Derwent, clasping and unclasping his feeble hands in feverish impatience.

"Here? To see you?" said Geoffrey, secretly delighted; "oh, I hope to-morrow or next day. She's dreadfully shaken, you know, and really ought to be shut up in a quiet place for a week or two, but she is so anxious about you that I suppose we shall have to let her come whenever she is able."

"Geoffrey, oh, boy, is she *genuine*?" besought Derwent, tears rolling down his haggard cheeks; "why does she endure all this for me?"

"I believe in her, uncle," said Geoffrey, solemnly; "and she will tell you the truth herself."

Presently Mr. Derwent was saying hopelessly that deliverance had come too late, that he felt the hand of death upon him, and that he would never live to unravel this mystery.

"And, indeed, it is a wonder that I have not felt the effects of the mad dog's bite before this," he said, with a shudder which convulsed his whole being, for his horror of this hideous peril which menaced him was morbid, and almost enough in itself to kill an ordinary man.

Then Geoffrey told him what Monica believed, that the dog had not been mad, and that Rufus had only attempted to play upon his imagination.

Derwent was struck with instant conviction of the truth, and inspired with new life, sprung up in his sick bed almost well again.

"She is right. I feel it!" he cried, joyfully. "I have not had the faintest approach of the symptoms of hydrophobia, no paroxysms of nervous derangement, no muscular convulsions at the sight of fluids—nor mental excitation. Well, well, I need not holloa too loud yet; I am by no means out of the wood. How much am I poisoned? Shall I ever throw off the effects and be a well man again? This horrible stupor in which they have kept me almost constantly seems to have sapped away my very heart-blood! And it is stealing upon me again. The excitement of seeing you has kept it off for a little while, but it is coming back! Oh, it drowns me in a horrible oblivion!"

He moved about restlessly, trying to fight off the exhausting drowsiness caused by the unknown death-drugs which had been administered to him, and Geoffrey, sharing his anxiety, hurried away to find Vulpino, that he might instantly begin to undo the mischief he had done. After some searching he met him entering the ruined tower from the court, where he had been seeing the Marshall brothers off, and dragging him hastily up-stairs, the critical work of counteracting the poison already consuming the vital forces of Mr. Derwent began.

Vulpino worked his best and planned his wisest; his own safety hung on the recovery of his patient; and Geoffrey, securely hidden under the forbidding exterior of Vulpino's London factotum, Barber, helped him and mounted guard over the patient; while Godiva Montacute gradually banished from the sick room, waited moodily in her own hidden chamber for the fatal end—the fearful consummation which she had already lived through in agony without repenting her of the crime she believed was being perpetrated.

Geoffrey could scarcely bear to see Godiva. Her very sex—her soft beauty—made her wickedness seem the more revolting. Had she taken the slightest notice of him, he would have felt it impossible to retain his incognito, but would have burst out on her in fierce, scathing denunciation.

As it was she never condescended to even glance at Vulpino's uncouth-looking assistant—dumbly attending to his meals three times a day, and retiring to her solitude between times.

Vulpino, however, made her talk to him during the *tete-a-tetes* which he managed to secure with her, several times each day; and Geoffrey soon found himself watching the progress of this ill-omened love-making with a species of ugly fascination.

By what spell was it that the ill-looking, grotesque and ghost-like Italian gradually established a rule over the bitter and reckless girl, who visibly paled with aversion when his hand touched hers, and shrunk back appalled when his keen black eyes, sparkling with weird fire, probed hers? How strange it was to note the gradual and stealthy removing of conventional barriers, and the shortening of the distance between the ill-assorted pair!

Once Geoffrey came upon Vulpino and Godiva standing together under the wall of the ruined tower, the gay morning sun streaming full upon his devilish head and her seraphic one, the black and the gold drawn close to each other. They were gazing silently into each other's eyes. Vulpino held one of Godiva's slender hands poised on his own finger-tips; he had slipped upon the arched white wrist a flexible golden Neapolitan bracelet, in the favorite de-

sign of a serpent with its tail in its mouth, and its back-bone incrustated with emeralds and opals.

As Geoffrey walked past, looking fixedly upon the strange pair, Godiva seemed to awake from a trance. She slowly, and with a visible effort, removed her eyes from Vulpino's, and a sigh came deep and tremulous up from the depths of her heart.

"Keep your heirloom for your bride, then, Signore Vulpino; what have I to do with it?" she muttered, haughtily, and snatching the bracelet off her wrist she forced it into his hand and rapidly vanished into the tower.

Vulpino turned a look fraught with cold triumph upon Geoffrey.

"Struggle she may as she please," said he, smoothly running the bracelet round and round in his hard black finger, "she weel note escappa—her destiny."

"Do you expect to induce her to break with Rufus Marshall?" asked Geoffrey, unable, in spite of her wickedness, to subdue a pang of pity for the miserable alternatives which lay before the helplessly bound adventuress.

"Rufus, ha! ha!" laughed Vulpino, in his low, oily voice, while his snaky black eyes gleamed green fire. "Do you note understand thees about pretta mees—dat she s'all bow down only to ze master spirit—note ever to heem who comes second? As long as Rufus, he was head, mees think, 'Yes I s'all be queen,' bote—Rufus, he ees heemself deceive; I am head; I know a great *something* weech mees herself knows note; I say, 'Come, proud amica, marry Vulpino and he weel unbosom.' And she weel yet say, 'Yes, great chief; I weel marry you.' Rufus—ha! ha! ha!" and the diabolic laughter slid out once more at the mere name of such an insignificant rival.

Geoffrey hurried back to his uncle. He felt sick at heart.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A STORY OF TRUE LOVE.

THANKS to Vulpino's zeal, Geoffrey's devotion, and Derwent's relief from anxiety, in the course of a week the invalid was able to be dressed and to move about his room leaning on his faithful nephew's shoulder. The wounds in his shoulder were healing without fever; and the stupefying effects of the poison he had absorbed were gradually disappearing under Vulpino's skillful treatment. The wound caused by the dog's fangs had been thoroughly cauterized half an hour after it was inflicted, and had ceased to cause the invalid any uneasiness.

He saw distinctly that this wound had only been inflicted that there might be a reason sufficiently plausible to excuse the mysterious removal of Mr. Derwent from the public's sight, and his speedy and secluded death; of course if he died of hydrophobia who would expect to be admitted to see the dreadful spectacle? And the false report that his heirs had taken him to France as a last hope, was well calculated to satisfy the most carping gossip that all had been done by his heirs to save the rich man that could be done; and if, after all, he died abroad and was brought home in a sealed casket to the family vault at Dornoch, his poor mutilated remains tenderly concealed from every eye, what more could his heirs have done?

Since Vulpino's change of treatment, and the departure of the Marshalls, Godiva had not entered the sick room. She was once or twice solicited by Vulpino, with much affected fervor, to share his weary vigil, while Barber was off duty; but his graphic description of the frightful change in the doomed man, and of his haunting entreaties for mercy, and his paroxysms of excruciating nervous derangement were more than enough to keep Godiva far from the terrible place. And the truth was that one glance at the invalid would have enlightened her. Hope, returning strength, gratified affection, and a nameless interest in the future, as connected with the now never-mentioned American girl, all these were assisting Mr. Derwent on his feet again, and obliterating with magical rapidity the signs of his past sufferings.

And every morning when Godiva greeted Vulpino she mutely asked with furtive, yet cruelly eager glance, "Is he dead?" and Vulpino would sigh, shrug one angular shoulder up to his skinny ear, and mumble about certain leathern constitutions that took long to kill, but surely such another night as last must, etc., etc.

Monica took longer to recover from her ordeal, though nursed with enthusiastic devotion by Mr. Price, who moved heaven and earth to fetch her all the delicacies her reduced condition demanded, and was never so happy as when he was half-carrying the muffled form of his late adversary up and down the strip of sward under the willows behind Toby's little cottage, and watching the pure cheek redden faintly under the sunny breeze. Cicely, too, adored and served Monica, figuratively on her knees. Her romantic situation, her wonderful story, her awful sufferings and her beauty, goodness and dignity, all conspired to make service a joyous boon to this simple-hearted worshiper. Toby, too, taciturn though he was, and black-browed, fairly gave himself up to the gentle spell of the pure-natured girl; his gnarled features relaxing into genial smiles, and his deep-set eye softening with feeling whenever she addressed him.

Every day Price met Geoffrey by appointment in a hazel copse near the Weald, and brought back to Monica the day's bulletin, but Geoffrey and Monica did not see each other again until Mr. Derwent was pronounced by his physician capable of undergoing a little physical exertion, and mental agitation.

The Weald was too gloomy a spot, and too inextricably associated with miserable recollections to be the right place for an invalid to brighten-up in, so as soon as he was strong enough to ride the distance, Geoffrey proposed moving the scene of his conva-

lucence to Toby's cottage, where Monica awaited her father with Jonathan Brade's confession ready to smooth away all obstacles between them.

It had been resolved that the master of Dornoch-Weald should be concealed with the gamekeeper while the final acts in the great tragedy of his supposed death were being enacted by the three conspirators.

They were to be cheated into running the due length of their chain, that their punishment might be complete.

Godiva should suppose herself a double murderess, guilty of the blood of Otto Derwent and his daughter Monica; so that Vulpino could command her through his knowledge of her crimes and the Marshall brothers should believe themselves equally guilty and successful in their schemes, that their downfall might be the more overwhelming afterward.

Geoffrey had dutifully consulted his uncle as to this course, and received his hearty approbation, for it was not to be thought of that the traitors should be allowed to escape unscathed, nor yet that the honor of the haughty house of Derwent should be humbled by publishing abroad the infamy of these unworthy offshoots through the institution of legal proceedings. To punish the guilty and yet spare the innocent from the shame of a public exposure, became the present aim of Geoffrey's life, and it was thought wisest to compass these ends by following the course indicated.

On the tenth morning after the departure of Rufus and Gavaine, Godiva's sapphire-bright eyes read in the narrow slits cut in the parchment face of Vulpino a more than usually Satanic significance, and a horrible paleness instantly overspread her charming features, accompanied by a visible shiver. It was exactly as if the door of an ice-filled vault had opened upon Godiva, and a blast of wintry rigor had swept over her. She seemed to shiver, to blanch, to wither up to half her size; she stood rooted to the spot before Vulpino, cowering.

"Mees's commands dey are obeyed," smirked the poisoner, not afraid to drive the cruel shaft home in the quivering flesh; "de revere oncle, he no more Povretto zio! He could not take de wealth weeth. Ah, bah! ole Vulpino ze man fore to bring pretta mees into her fortunes!—ole Vulpino he hand and glove weeth king Death; they always work in concert. Rufus win a fortune for pretta mees? Ah, bah! *nevare!* Rufus notsing bote a stupid coward. Mees weel nevare marry *heem!* Eh, donna divina?"

Godiva comprehended not a word of this sly harangue; she was face to face with murder, red and reeking, and her very heart seemed to die within her. It was done. Her benefactor was dead, at her command! Ay, her injury was avenged now, sure enough. He would never look upon her again, with that maddening memory of her proffered love lurking in his eye, a gleam of mockery. But, oh, what a little thing to take his life away for!

"Oh, Otto! Otto!" wailed Godiva Montacute, with a sudden, dreadful cry.

Vulpino first stared in quick amazement and curiosity. The woman's eye was rolling, her hands were in her hair, tearing it, she greedily enduring the physical hurts she was inflicting upon herself; she was almost frenzied.

He thought it was fear; he never dreamed it could be *love!* He flung out his long arms; he dared to catch her to his hungry heart; it was a gruesome embrace for the man was old, particularly misshapen, and had all the unwholesome grotesqueness and uncleanness of the lower classes among foreigners; but she was less a woman at that moment, with dainty flesh and blood to lure and be lured, than a lost soul, giddy and frantic from its first look into the caverns of hell. So she did not repulse him; she let him press her golden head against his rusty bosom where the pulses beat hard and hurried under her ear, and bend his bestial muzzle to her lovely mouth which quivered and gnashed under his insolently, coarsely-prolonged kiss. She looked like an angel prisoned in the vile arms of some hateful satyr.

She scarcely knew what he was doing, though, for anguish of mind. And I think that even if she had known, she so abhorred the fair, soft body which held her murderous spirit, that she would have been passive, taking a grim delight in heaping pain and shame and dishonor upon a thing so infamous as herself.

Then Vulpino put the serpent upon her wrist, and said loudly and distinctly:

"Mees Montacute, I 'av reeked my life fore to obey you in the death of I signore; I now desire you fore my wife, 'aving purchased-a you weeth his death. You cannot but obey; I 'av your life in my hands, and a word can ruin. I 'ave love you instead; carissima, be mine."

Godiva mechanically released herself from his grasp, and with the vacant, wandering look of an idiot, tottered off to her own room.

But she carried the serpent on her arm.

During this scene Geoffrey was leading Toby's shaggy little pony "Scamp" carefully through the forest toward Toby's modest home. Otto Derwent was on Scamp's back, leaning somewhat feebly now on the willing shoulder of Montague Price, and again on the magnificent muscular shoulder of his nephew Geoffrey, as they changed places in amicable relief of each other.

Mr. Derwent knew he was going to see Monica Rivers, and to hear her story of why she came to Dornoch after him.

He expected his feelings to be harrowed by the unavoidable mention of his guilty wife Ada, and he never dreamed of Monica being anything more to him than some connection of Ada Rivers, too good for the unworthy mission she had undertaken.

Monica was awaiting this strange reunion in a mood singularly tranquil and joyous, considering the very different feelings with which she had first

come to this place, and the wild heights and depths they had oscillated betwixt since then.

The reason was simple. Jonathan Brade's confession had exculpated Otto Derwent from all that bitter blame which his daughter had heaped upon him while she sat by the dead form of her deserted mother. Also, had she not suffered much for his sake? And is not love best fostered by its own generous sacrifices? Ah, yes, it is not the reception of benefits which builds up love; it is the conferring of them.

For what we succor we graciously stoop down to and so love; and what we injure we have to lift our eyes to, on its pedestal of innocence, and so we hate it well.

Monica looked very, very sweet and tender, sitting in the little window framed with white and golden honeysuckle; her small pale face was delicate in contour and fine in expression as any face ever carried by a Derwent, and the lustrous splendor of her dark, dreamy eyes compensated for every classic want the critical might detect. Anxious to please the fastidious taste of her father, she had laid aside her somber black dress and wore, to-day, pure filmy white, the transparent folds crossed over her ivory neck and bust in noble lines, and caught at the finely-turned throat by a cluster of rich royal purple pansies, gathered from Cicely's garden by Mr. Price, with the dew still glistening on them, and sweetly accepted by Monica, whose gentle goodness of heart had led her long ago to forgive the young lawyer all past transgressions and to sympathize readily and candidly with his modest attempts to be the nice fellow he saw she believed him to be. Gone was Mr. Montague Price's knowing swagger, his lazy slang jargon, his ineffable wink, and his hard, unscrupulous Yankee spirit of self-interest. He had developed a genuine admiration of Monica's noble soul and set himself in earnest to make himself worthy the coveted post of friend to her. It indicated the miracle which pure goodness had wrought upon him that he had not presumed to fall in love with his guiding star, and would have deprecated, shamefully enough, the suspicion of so lowering her to his own level.

Cicely, in her picturesque short striped wincey petticoat coming to the neat ankles of her stoutly-shod little feet, her broad, white apron and gay scarlet shawl crossed over her swelling bust, stood modestly behind the young lady's chair, watching from the window for the first sign of the approaching visitors as eagerly as Monica herself, and Toby, seated on a short wooden bench in the porch, where he could command a view of the road out of one open door and a view of the graceful white lady and her Hebe-like attendant through another, industriously employed his spare energies in cleaning his rusty firelocks, whistling softly under his breath, and feeling a queer softness about his heart as he thought on the approaching disclosure of the daughter to her father.

At last!

Geoffrey it was who brought Otto Derwent into the presence of his daughter.

Somehow, as by a preconcerted signal, every one else had melted away, and when the first dimness of emotion had passed from Monica's eyes and she could look up, the master of Dornoch-Weald was seated before her in the chair of state, the only person there.

For two or three moments both were silent; the alteration in each startled and shocked the other with unexpected force; besides, Monica was looking consciously upon her father, and Derwent was in the presence of the enigma who had lurked in his thoughts ever since he had first seen her.

Hers was the strongest emotion; it urged her first to speak.

"How terribly you have suffered!" she said, faintly, and sliding out of the great draped invalid-chair in which Cicely had enthroned her, upon her knees, she bent her lovely, piteous face and kissed, with lips that trembled, his pale hand.

Derwent, deeply moved, gently caressed her glossy little head with his free hand, murmuring in low sweet tones that had not been heard in his voice for nineteen years:

"And you, sweet child, *why* have you risked your life for mine?"

Still on her knees, Monica took a paper from her belt, and smoothed it open on his knee. He marvelled at the rich blush which warmed her cold cheek, at the quick swelling and panting of her bosom—at the eloquent glance, blending entreaty with pity, love with tender reproach, which her dark brilliant eyes flashed upon him; then he looked at the paper, and saw this heading:

"JONATHAN BRADE'S CONFESSION."

The Master of Dornoch had neither heard nor uttered this name for nineteen years; yet it had lived in his memory like a flaw in a gem, robbing it of all its value. It was a name synonymous with all that was base, black and tormenting; it was the devil's pitchfork with which he could stir up the deepest hell-fire of the man's soul.

As he looked his sight was blasted; his whole face changed dreadfully; his mouth twitched and curled in a demoniac snarl.

He rose roughly, letting the fair woman drop apart as she chanced, and a low, venomous curse hissed upon her tingling ear.

Still kneeling in unconscious symbolism of the pleading and humble attitude of her spirit toward him; with her angelic countenance raised imploringly, and her sweet eyes raining tears, Monica said, solemnly:

"Only read it—oh, surely you will do my—do *her* that justice! Have you not judged her unheard long enough?"

He stooped over her; his blazing eyes seemed seeking to pierce her through.

"My—*what?*" demanded he, suddenly growing dead calm.

Monica had narrowly escaped saying "my mother." That would be to begin at the wrong end of the disclosure. She shrunk from confessing the claim she had on him until, her mother's innocence proven, he would of himself crave her for his daughter.

He read her reluctance, her fear and longing, and all passion sunk like a fire quenched by a sea. In another moment he was gasping and groping among the overwhelming tide of ideas which surged over him.

He sunk back in his seat, grasping the young girl with involuntary ardor and drawing her toward him, then pushing her away with a beseeching cry:

"Oh, girl, whoever you are, keep eternal silence—unless I bid you speak!"

And he picked up the paper from the floor at his feet, and began to read it.

Page after page he turned; those first scenes of his love and folly; *ay de mi!* how sweet poor Ada was—how white-souled she had seemed—the noblest woman he had ever seen; he had fondly believed this then! Oh, fickle, bad heart, how was it you could nurture such loathsome impulses in your gentle bosom? Ah, here comes the confession of confessions—the story of that night which exposed the wife's infidelity and parted them forever. What! she never loved Jonathan? What! repulsed him?—*abhorred him?* Bah! a lying tale to extort money.

No, the man's dying confession. Every trifle faithfully reproduced—the whole dire scene painted by an eye-witness—by the principal actor himself. No forgery—no ruse; God's truth, revealed at last.

Oh, the years! the years! How many? And Ada, innocent Ada, injured Ada! Oh, God! could you not have opened his eyes sooner? Dear, angel Ada, abandoned without a chance of self-defense, broken-hearted!

The man laid down the paper on the arm of his chair, his face upon it, and his whole frame shuddered with grief.

So strong was his nature, so ardent his feelings and so deeply rooted, that this sudden revelation well-nigh killed him. He forgot his surroundings—Monica, late events, all; he was back at Addiscombe, the passionately-loving young husband, with the one love of his life lying pale and helpless in the arms of her demon destroyer, and her duped husband deserting her with a cruel haste.

Looking upon that crushed form, passion-con-vulsed, and oblivious to all but Ada, the daughter could no longer complain that her father's love for her mother had been shallow or fickle; no, here it was still, a poor, blighted, tortured wraith of its old radiant, burning self, but strong enough and passionate enough to make the silent observer tremble.

For Ada was dead; remorse had come too late. Dead, without one whisper to console her for her long agony—gone beyond the power of restitution.

Alas! why had he had so little faith in her?

That fierce soul-storm blowing by, Derwent went on with the confession; and read, in the sullen penitent's broad, upright, heavy writing, the piteous tale of Ada's fate. How her eternal separation from himself had been insured by that impudent falsehood about the traveler, accidentally shot dead; and here he looked through the waving honeysuckle sprays into the blue depths of the o'erarching heavens, bitterly asking the omnipotent Creator of all why He need frame woman's head so weak when He makes her heart so strong? Deceived by a tale that could scarcely impose upon a child! Wrecked in smooth waters, with Love and Faith on board—all for lack of a little worldly wisdom!

And then he read of the wicked Jonathan's last attempt to obtain possession of this frail, foolish creature; and of his signal defeat and eternal discomfiture, when the frail and foolish creature towered up into a goddess of all that was faithful, proud and heroic; then of his revenge, his dastardly, abject revenge, how he set himself, like a weasel in a dove-cot, to suck the life-blood of the gentle, brooding thing, a few drops at a time, as long as the loyal blood lasted out—she submitting with mute resignation, in the fond, faithful supposition that she was thereby purchasing her luckless Otto's safety; and when the haughty Derwent, grown imperial in all his habits of thought and action, through the long years of lonely prosperity and secret wound, pictured to himself that soft-natured, nestling thing, that had been all love and delicate joyousness, and clinging fragility in his bosom, racked by thoughts of his peril, haunted by visions of blood spilt by the hand she loved—meekly offering her silken breast for the viperous bite of her loathsome enemy, enduring without a moan the greedy, pitiless draining of her poor heart's blood, and dumbly smoothing her dimmed plumage over the ugly wound that no soul might see how she suffered lest he might ask why; and this in the belief that she was doing it *for him*, and that he was living safe and prosperous through these her eagerly borne agonies—when Derwent had taken all this in, he softly laid the record down, and falling on his knees before high heaven, poured out his broken heart in sighs and throes of loving anguish.

And his daughter, not revealed to him as yet, prayed with him, silently and apart. Not for worlds would she have intruded upon the stricken man's hour of sorrow, every added moment of which repaid the great wrong he had done her mother, and the miserable years he had given her, more fully and generously.

Looking upon the desolate man, crouching there before God in unutterable love and distress, how she loved him! How her noble heart sunk at the bitter blow yet in store for him—that this Ada was dead—and would never hear one word of all that was raging in his heart! How she trembled and gasped at the thought that soon he would read who *she* was.

and turn to her as the only one thing left him of poor, martyred Ada, and lean upon her love, and perhaps at last take comfort from it!

Well, at last Derwent roused himself, and with sudden, vehement desire to know where his faithful wife was, snatched up the felon's confession and read on.

Read on to the end without pause; learning with a great cry and a single lightning glance of wonder and ecstasy that he had a child, and that this was she—the beautiful devoted creature with Ada's loyal, brave soul, and the lovely body of proud Dame Godiva Derwent of olden times; read on greedily, of Ada's years of toil and privation in the obscure little hamlet Loangerie; read of her wasting strength, her waning means; of Monica's unavailing struggles in the district school and midnight lace-sewing; of the mysterious drain on their resources that paralyzed the daughter and discouraged the mother, until at last—not three months ago—oh, God! she died of want.

Into the icy vault of eternal and unalterable despair, at last it seemed to poor Otto Derwent that a clear, soft ray of heavenly light penetrated, and that, lifting his heavy eyes, he beheld the angel of Consolation bending lovingly over him, with a message from pitying God for him.

It was Monica, his beautiful unknown child, Ada's darling daughter; she had him in her tender arms, his head pressed to her loving heart; and her tears of affection and sympathy made a message that only God could send—saying to the lonely man:

"I am Ada's love in daughter's shape; live, and love me."

And so he will; God be praised for His grand Law of Compensation.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ALAS, BEAUTIFUL GODIVA!

It was twenty-four hours since Vulpino had announced to Godiva Montacute:

"Mees's commands, dey are obey; dze oncle ees no more."

She was lying on her bed with her eyes closed, her face, though alarmingly pallid, was placid as that of a sleeping child, and her beautiful bosom lightly shielded by the delicate creamy lace of her azure peignoir, rose and fell in regular and natural breathing.

There was a rude tumult at her locked door, some one knocking furiously, and a high frantic voice imploring her to speak—but one word, to show that she lived.

Godiva had never been seen by Vulpino since he had told her that the deed was done; he had respected her privacy during the first twelve hours, going through all the hideous sounds of conveying the dead body secretly out of the house at the dead of night, with the assistance of Barber—actually burying a long box full of earth in a hole he had dug in the forest, and then coming back and making all the preparations for slipping away from the fatal spot to join the Marshalls, according to agreement. Then he had for the first time disturbed Miss Montacute's solitude, requesting her to come forth, as all was finished here.

She had not answered, and after a few vain efforts to obtain some recognition of his presence, the Italian had retired, fearful of provoking the fair lady's ire by too pertinacious intrusion on her mood, which chanced to be a dumb one.

After some considerable time he had applied his hard knuckles again to the panels of Miss Montacute's door, with no better result; and then he had strode away in black jealous fury, believing that the lady was quietly intimating to her tool that she had no further use for him, and therefore considered any subsequent intercourse unnecessary. Having fumed about the grim and ghostly corridors for some hours, back he comes again, knocking insolently, calling loudly, explaining, entreating, threatening, and finally standing dead still, struck to the heart with the sudden suspicion of treachery.

The lady had fled!

He staggered against the opposite wall, glaring at the sealed door while his great uncouth features writhed and grinned in hideous contortions, and his long grimy fingers clawed the air in a frenzy.

Then he went away, and soon returned with a heavy log he had found in one of the sheds, and using this as a battering-ram, at the third thundering thud the stout oaken door gave way with a crash, and he came reeling into the middle of the room, ram and all, and encountering a velvet foot-cushion, sprawled his length on the floor with great din and confusion.

As he gathered himself up, cursing like a brigand in his own liquid tongue, but with the voice of some foul bird of rapine, he saw Godiva lying among her pillows, beautiful, tranquil, unawakened through all this deafening bruit.

With a cry the passionate Italian was beside that lovely waxen shape, his cavernous eyes devoured her, his great bat-like ear bent to listen at her pale lips and her slowly-beating heart; his ugly, untrimmed finger-tip lightly and delicately lifted one magnolia-petal eyelid, while his burning eyes peered at the half-seen pupil, which neither quivered nor shrunk from the ray of light let in upon it; and then the poisoner stood up white as death, and wiped the great beads of sweat which agony had brought out on his bony brow.

"Escaped me indeed, sweet lady!" he whispered, mournfully, in his own tongue; "thou hast drank thy last draught—from this."

He picked up a small vial from the table at the bedside; it was half-empty, and the nature of the poison still remaining in it, was to sink the victim into a dreamless, painless sleep, from which there

was no awaking, unless the strongest measures were adopted to rouse him and keep him awake.

But Godiva had already been asleep for twenty-four hours, and her pulses were even now so feeble that Vulpino despaired of saving her.

Why had she done this? Was it from remorse, or was it fear of him?

"Carissima—my soul!" he moaned, weeping bitterly as he hung over her; "I love thee—I would have been thy slave! And I am rich—oh, so rich, fair amica, and thou lovest gold and homage. Thou shouldst have reigned in Valdemara, my palace on the Adriatic, a palace coveted by many an archduke and Turkish dignitary; thou shouldst have reigned, my principessa, over all the beautiful hours of my harem! Why didst thou choose vile, worm-infested death to the love of Vulpino?"

Thus he raved for some time, despair paralyzing all efforts at restoration; and the miserable woman would undoubtedly have died as she intended, had not Geoffrey, struck by manly pity, come back to the Weald to succor her if she were in need of his aid, and really desired to escape Vulpino's horrible passion.

The first shock over, he, being the calmer of the two, suggested that as long as there was life there was hope; and that surely the Italian, out of the fullness of his knowledge of such matters, might save her by his skill.

This was all that was needed to inspire the inflammable Southerner; instantly he was immersed in the case, and with Geoffrey as faithful executor of all his commands, soon began to hope.

How they toiled with that poor, self-destroyed woman, walking her between them to and fro in cold places, incessantly bringing back sensation to her skin by the use of strong stimulants, forcing other stimulants down her reluctant throat, which mechanically refused to swallow of itself; always reopening her eyelids which would droop over the fixed and senseless eyes—plying her languid nostrils with sharp essences; and so on through all the ghastly and toilsome course of battling out a death-dealing sleeping-potion!

And Godiva, tottering about on unfelt limbs, sleeping on her feet, staring at the sun with blind eyes, wincing not at the terrible touch of such desperate agents as ice, fire, stinging essences and thrilling electricity, knew nothing of it for many, many hours; until the two men, worn out but exultant, sat, one on each side of her, in the rose-garden at dusk, and she lifted her head suddenly and looked at them.

"Geoffrey!" she whispered, in feeble but passionately-entreated tones; and then hysteria overwhelmed her, and Vulpino carried her in, too exhausted to repel the hateful contact, and the great tears coursing down her white cheeks in rivers.

And Geoffrey's honest heart ached for the misguided woman whose falseness and self-seeking had brought her to such a pass.

He made up his mind to follow her when she had had time to recover her self-control, and in spite of Vulpino's oft-repeated entreaties that she should be left under the subduing belief of Mr. Derwent's death, that he would tell her the truth, give her back her peace of mind on that point, as also concerning Monica's safety, and afford her one more chance to redeem her character by a life of penitence and sincerity.

His merciful thoughts were interrupted by the sound of wheels on the gravel in front of the house. Curious to see who could be coming here when the place was supposed to be shut up, he made his way hastily round the many angles of the mansion, and came in sight of an unexpected tableau.

A closed coach was drawn up close in front of the little sheltered door of the ruined tower; the coachman on the box, and the lackey who was handing up a valise to him, wore both the same rather fantastic livery of dark blue and scarlet, with gold cockades, and were both dark, aquiline-nosed, and black-eyed; evidently servants and countrymen of Vulpino's.

Geoffrey was still perhaps fifty yards away, so astonished that he had come to a halt, when, in spite of the closeness of the door of the chariot to the door of the tower, he saw Vulpino step into the former, bearing a muffled female figure in his arms.

Ha! an abduction? No, no, poor Godiva, not while such an honest heart as Geoffrey's beats near you!

He bounded forward; Vulpino's lynx eyes detected him coming. Running like a hare, he shouted a brief order; banded to the coach door; the lackey was in the rumble; the coachman wheeled cleverly, and the coach and four spanking horses were spinning down the avenue.

Geoffrey flashed out a revolver—he had carried one since his enforced intercourse with the professional murderer—and cried:

"Halt! or I fire!"

And in spite of Vulpino's yell to drive on, and the unlovely apparition of his hobgoblin torso thrust out of the window, in grim companionship with the twin of Geoffrey's weapon, the white-livered Tuscan actually did halt, and, with all the odds in his favor—namely, sixteen thoroughbred legs to carry him out of shot at the rate of ten miles an hour, two men beside himself, every man of the trio armed to the teeth, and only one enemy walking sturdily upon his own two legs—poor Leonata da Vinci cowered down in the boot, dodging his sleek black head and flapping ears down out of range, and waited with a very scared and pacific visage for the denouement.

In spite of Vulpino's reiterated assertions, clinched with oaths of the hottest Tuscan complexion, that he would shoot him dead as "uno cano," if he ventured a step nearer, and his sworn word that the lady was with him of her own free will, and he would not permit her to be agitated by another sight of Geoffrey, that young hero marched straight up to the muzzle

of Vulpino's leveled six-shooter, looked him sternly in the eye while he wrenched the door from him, and then, shoving him unceremoniously to one side, looked in at Miss Montacute.

She was not muffled or bound in any way visible, and she looked at him stonily, making no appeal.

Was Vulpino right then? Was she capable of this last most unwomanly act of all—to sell herself to the man whom she knew to be a paid assassin, and supposed to be the murderer of Monica Derwent and her father—to purchase her own personal safety? Oh, wretched Godiva, when you began your downward course, in the undisciplined desires and ambitions of a selfish nature, could you have believed that you would ever come to stoop so low as this? Perhaps, poor desperate soul, you know not what this man is doing, or, in your half-crazed dismay at the success of your schemes, think it little matter now what befalls you; you have played your last card, in trying to fly life, and your wily opponent has dashed down the winning card after you, and in saving your miserable life, snatched at it for his reward.

"Cousin," said Geoffrey, entreatingly, "where are you going?"

"With him," replied Godiva.

"Of your own free will?"

"Yes."

"To be his wife?"

Godiva answered not. Her slow, rigid smile made Geoffrey's heart stand still with a momentary thrill of foreboding.

"Godiva—poor girl—don't destroy yourself. There is really no cause why you should run away. Godiva, I pray you, don't be frightened—but—you have been deceived. Nobody has—has—died."

He feared to kill her with the shock; he was doing his best to soften it. She heard him distinctly, and gave no sign whatever. He could not believe his senses.

"I swear it, Godiva, nobody has been sacrificed—Mr. Derwent and his daughter are both alive," he repeated, with deep earnestness.

"Let us go," said she to Vulpino, stonily.

"Do you not believe me?" cried Geoffrey, well-nigh beside himself.

She answered nothing.

"She does, of course; indeed I have told her the truth already," muttered Vulpino in Italian and in Geoffrey's ear, a vicious smile of triumph on his evil features; "but it is natural that she should not care to meet them again, and prefer even my love, and a royally voluptuous life with me, to the contemptuous pity and maddening forgiveness of those she has injured. Now let us proceed. I have earned my liberty according to contract. You have no right to delay me another moment."

"That is true, and since she will not let me save her, although I am her kinsman, I have no right to detain her either. Go, then! Alas, Godiva, do you indeed prefer the love and homage of such a miscreant to the heavenly kindness of that lovely soul, Monica Derwent, and the noble-hearted pardon of her father? For I can, without hesitation, promise you both."

She suddenly bent toward him, her gem-blue eyes glistening strangely.

"Geoffrey Kilmyre," said she, in a low, breathless voice, "you argue as a man argues—as a good, brave man argues, who is not afraid to face anything in heaven or earth. Let me tell you a woman's arguments are different; and the arguments of a woman like me—like me"—she had spoken lower and lower, her last word here was a groan, and was followed by a little wild silence—"oh, they are the most unexpected of all," she resumed, calmly again; "you think me the wickedest woman in the world, and you only speak to me out of the depths of your horror and pity. I might suffer this from you—do you know why? I never loved you! Perhaps you sometimes imagined that I did: I own that I wished you to marry me—that is, if you were sure to inherit your uncle's fortune. That you passed me by with indifference bitterly wounded my pride, but not my love. I wished you ill because you presumed to slight me, not because you did not love me. But with your uncle it was different. I did love him—I did—oh, God!"

Her invocation was a tingling cry—such a shriek of human woe might have issued from the torture-chamber of some ancient inquisition, where some poor soul, drenched with the bloody sweat of her own agonies, was forced to lift her eyes and blast them with the sight of that she loved best enduring worse, in silence, for her sake! Geoffrey staggered against the door of the coach, turning sick and faint; even Vulpino, smitten through his love for the guilty woman, covered his ears with his hands, and hung his head between his knees in abject distress. No one dared comfort her. She glanced at one and the other and suddenly laughed.

Geoffrey could not bear it. With a choking sob and his eyes hidden, he staggered back, and turned away to the Weald—turned away forever.

That wild laughter was still ringing silverly, when the chariot rolled on its way, and only died out in distance.

Ay, so you go, sinning woman, to drink your cup of humiliation to the dregs—and no mortal can save you.

Only God.

A few hours afterward Geoffrey slowly and thoughtfully wended his way back to Toby's cottage.

Since the reunion of father and daughter he had not seen them. As he walked in the golden light under the ancient oaks that had crowned the demesnes of the Derwents for three centuries, he thought of the everlasting foundations of truth, and of the ephemeral reign of all that is false and evil, when it comes to issue with that grand power.

For where is the murder that will not ooze out, be it laid deep as the bottomless pit, and Alp on Alp piled over it? Where is the wrong done the innocent, however unsuspecting, that does not creep out of its long torpor, to flutter with tell-tale wing into the faces of injurer and injured, at last?

And he stepped across a little mountain brook, stealing black and stealthy down the hill, broadening across the emerald meadow, and surging to the blue sea line, a power in the land; and he thought of the "beginnings of evil," when the first bad impulses of the young soul creep out black and stealthy, and trickle their course down, downward ever, and broaden with opportunity; across the fair green meads of specious seeming; and swell and grow with indulgence, until banks of dissembling will not hold them, nor brimming water-course guide them; and they seethe forth, a desolating flood on every side, spreading ruin and dismay, until they hurl themselves dizzy, desperate, helpless, into the ocean of Retribution, where they are swallowed up forever.

Alas, for beautiful Godiva!

CHAPTER XXX.

THE STAR OF LOVE.

GEOFFREY came to the rustic gate of Cicely Cargill's garden as the star of love rose golden above the firmament. Every scented leaf bore its row of dew-brilliant, and the sweet gilly-flower and triplet clusters of small pink cinnamon roses swung incense to the beloved star.

A murmur of voices mingled with the hushed sounds of evening; with the low breathing of the oaks on the hillside, and the creaking of the dry branches far mid-forest; with the chirr of the birds as they fluttered to their leafy perches, and the husky whisper of a lonely whip-poor-Will; with the subdued tinkle of Cicely's pink china cups and saucers, as she stepped about her little kitchen putting away her modest tea-service; with the luxurious snoring of Toby's favorite watch-dog, honest, ugly Mop, who sprawled across the snow-white door stone, ragged and yellow. It was a time and scene to make all that was artificial seem irrationally so, and all that suggested fashion, worldly wisdom and conventional distasteful.

As Geoffrey walked gently up the white sanded garden walk between low borders of box, with knots of rosemary and spikes of southern-wood announcing themselves in odor-language of otto and nuts, he bared his graceful head in involuntary reverence to the genius of the hour, and a great rush of soft, delicious longing brimmed full his heart.

The voices which murmured in the dusk were Monica's and her father's; he could see the soft, white shape of the girl as she sat on the rude bench under the triumphal arch of honeysuckle and scarlet fuchsias which Toby had pruned and trained over it from the day when Cicely had promised to come and be his garden's mistress. Geoffrey could see that Monica's head was on her father's shoulder, her hand clasped in his; also that the proud head of haughty Derwent was bowed till his cheek rested on her soft black tresses, and he would have stolen away again, with a sudden, chilly feeling of being apart, an alien, and shut out in the cold—but that Monica's bright eyes caught sight of the tall, retiring figure, and she whispered something hurriedly, her lips to her father's ear and her arms thrown round his neck.

"Geoffrey, come to us, my boy," said Mr. Derwent; and Geoffrey thought he had never before observed the wonderful sweetness and expressiveness of his uncle's voice. He went swiftly, gladly, his heart leaping on before him.

And these two parted, and drew him down between them, and each held a hand.

Geoffrey said nothing; he looked in the grand face of haughty Derwent, transfigured with holy emotions, purified in the furnace of the affections, and into the dark, divine eyes of high-souled Monica, glorified, too, with love and sympathy; he was very pale, but he crested his handsome head, looking at the "love star" in the firmament like a young god.

"Dear boy, you know it all—the bitter blunder of the past," said Mr. Derwent, softly; "and you see how blessed I am to-night. My child, Geoffrey, my beloved Ada's daughter—as noble a woman as ever breathed; no need to tell you that, boy; you saw it first, God bless your honest heart! and you knew what you were saying when you prophesied that I would love you all the better for your defense of her. Take her hands, Geoffrey, and tell her how welcome she is to our hearts and her rights."

And Geoffrey took both the sweet hands in his, and bending, with a flashing glance into her eyes, laid his lips softly on her white forehead, and said, in a breathless way:

"Welcome home, darling cousin, to uncle and to me."

And she grew burning red and her face quivered; then grew lily white, and she breathed quickly, and his hands on hers seemed to shoot electricity straight to her bounding heart, and hers in his seemed to do the same to him; their eyes met, and each pair emitted a flash of strange dazzling fire, and they grew together—for five seconds as mortals measure time, for an aeon at least of rapture, as love's sand-glass counts it; then the lady shivered and drew back, her long, jetty lashes falling over the brilliant windows of her soul, and a final rich tide of crimson sweeping from brow to chin and slowly dying out again.

And Geoffrey turned to his uncle, panting a little and smiling; such a dazzling face had never amazed the haughty Derwent, who looked wistfully from one to the other, with a pang of sharp reminiscence at the heart.

"Do you know what my little girl has made me promise?" said he, as soon as he saw that they were capable of listening to the utterances of mundane

reality; "to make you co-heir with herself, because, says my darling, 'Of course I know Geoffrey is too noble to be affected in the least by such a thing, but I cannot consent to occupy a position which so thoroughly darkens his. I cannot consent to be the cause of his worldly loss; I should always be uneasily conscious that if I was not an unwelcome intruder in his life, it was only because he was too noble to look at the matter in that light.' So, as my Monica will be happiest so, and so in truth will I, you two shall share alike when I am dead—only the Weald shall be hers as direct lineal descendant, and when she marries her husband must take the name of Derwent. Eh, boy?"

For answer Geoffrey rose and stood before the father and daughter, an exquisite humility and suppliancy in his attitude.

"Only on one condition shall I consent to such royal generosity—and, oh, don't tell me that your goodness has made me presumptuous. Uncle, give me Monica for my wife!"

Who with human sentiment could have remained unmoved by the quick, low, thrilling voice, the humble deprecation, the suppressed passion and entreaty of the beautiful youth? Not Otto Derwent, whose passions had ever been tropical, and in spite of that, lasting, and who had loved this boy from his infancy as David loved Absalom, and with far more justice.

"Dear boy—dear Geoffrey, oh, I am so, so glad of this!" he exclaimed, almost in his old, full round tones. "You loved her before you knew who she was; I saw it all the time—and how little I guessed the profound happiness it was to bring me! Yes, Geoffrey, I do, with all my heart, give my consent to your winning my daughter's hand if you can. And, children—I do think love will run smooth for once." This the master uttered playfully as he wrung Geoffrey's hand, patted Monica's bent head, and slowly paced up the dusky walk.

There was a short silence while the lover pored over the fascinating story of drooping attitude and hurrying blushes of his adored. Then he bent his proud head in true love's royal humility. No anointed queen was ever more reverently wooed.

"I think I could win your love in time, Monica," murmured Geoffrey.

"I am so far beneath you, sir—"

"No, no, no—what blasphemy!" cried he, interrupting the low, sad murmur vehemently.

"So far beneath you and your compeers, sir," Monica resumed, with timid earnestness. "I mean in courtliness of training, in social culture, and in all the etiquette of the highly born. Would you not blush for my lack of training?"

"As God hears me, Monica, the lack you speak of is such a bubble compared with the treasures of mind and heart which you possess, that I cannot think even for a moment of it. What! Am I to lose the lovely spirit which could make the rest of my life a heaven on earth, because to-day you do not know how to enter a drawing-room or how to make a court bow? In a week you could learn it all. Darling, let me teach you how to love me. Oh, Monica, my one love!"

He bowed his head still lower, till his face was on her clasped hands which lay in her lap, and he was almost on his knees. He was so anxious to win her, and so skeptical as to his own merits, that he readily dreaded above all things, that the proud American girl, accustomed to despise the cramping fetters of conservatism, and born to laugh at rank and title—would calmly reject his proposal, and by mere force of an independent character, force him to accept his share of his uncle's wealth in spite of him.

He was not prepared to feel two soft hands fluttering tremulously round his neck, creeping nearer and nearer, until they clasped in a close clasp, leaving a chain of love about him, and a hot satin cheek pressed to his.

"From the first—I loved you, dear—dear!" whispered Monica.

Oh, the lovely hour of love, first love! Tender and true be it ever—ever!

CHAPTER XXXI.

A TORTURING VICTORY.

RUFUS and Gavaine Marshall were about equally unfitted to appreciate a holiday season spent in Paris. To be sure, both were supposed to speak French fluently, and to be well enough informed on that and every other similar matter, to know how to get along without attracting more than usual share of foreign attention to their British *gaucheries*; at least that had been their own candid opinion, backed up by the envious admiration of their compeers—(traders, every man of them)—and the ever quoted fact that Rufus had gone in at one end of a university course, and out at the other, with quiet success; and that Gavaine would doubtless have kept neck and neck with him, had not his forte been more in the prize-fighter's line than in the scholar's, causing him to be ignominiously "plucked" in the third term of his martyrdom, when he retired upon his laurels to the bosom of his particular circle, as villainous a crew of harpies as could be found on that prolific field, the English turf.

Both the sons of the tailor-millionaire, Jack Marshall, had always had more of that idiotic man's money to spend than was at all good for them; but while Rufus used his in a most ardent pursuit of social distinction, counting all means fair that would advance him one hair's breadth up the steep hill of exclusiveness which stretched its grim barriers between the sons of tailors and the sons of "gentlemen"—Gavaine ruffled it at his ease among his kindred spirits, delighted to feel himself "cock o' the walk," as he loved to express it, and cheerfully humored on that point by the sycophantic mob who surrounded him, ready to fool him to the top of his bent as long as he mounted the throne among

them with his fists full of gold and his spirit benignly moved to limitless "treating."

Of course, after ten years the respective habits of the brothers had made wide rents in the tailor's wealth; Rufus had a way of sinking money, mean and selfish as he was, that had long appalled and lately had infuriated his father almost to the verge of disinheriting him; there was an incredible baseness, and a monstrous vice in his expenditures that revolted even the roughs who did homage to Gavaine; and then he was such an ingrained "cheat and liar"—to quote his father—that even when the truth would have been his best friend he chose prevarication and mystification; in fact, no one, not even himself, actually knew the ruinous results pending his sneaking course, and it was sheer fright and desperation which had set him on the dark road to replenish his fortunes, which we have seen him follow, at the Weald.

Gavaine's extravaganzas were costly, too, no doubt, and once or twice a quarter lipped up far over his ears, which were chronically in debt, and had to come before his exasperated parent; but Gavaine had one great merit—he could not "tell a lie," any more than could the first utterer of those great words. But there was this trifling difference between the English rake and the immortal American: Washington "could not" because he "would not"—Gavaine could not simply because—he could not. It requires imagination to make a lie; Gavaine had no imagination. It requires fancy, some reasoning faculties, enough observation and knowledge of human nature to impose on people possessed of these qualities; and Gavaine had none of these. Therefore, his debts were wont to come before poor cowering Jack Marshall's seam-beleaved eyes in all their hideous reality, the items representing "value received" unblushingly detailed in the strong black characters of Gavaine's pet lawyer, a "shyster" and "blackleg," very emphatically ignored by his respectable brethren in the profession; and Gavaine took care always to be on hand in all his sullen insolence, ready to bully, storm and blaspheme his unhappy parent into the breach, and not even having the grace to promise amendment for the future.

The old story—ignorance, toil, saving, hoarding, for the father; indulgence, savage unrestraint, selfishness, extravagance and ingratitude for the sons. Most money-grubs have at least the small consolation of dying out of the way before their butterfly heirs commence to scatter the golden shower out of their rigidly-sealed up bags; but poor Marshall had the anguish of seeing these beloved guineas tossed away by handfuls—guineas which he had gathered by the hard toil of a lifetime; no wonder if, at last, half crazed by the spectral apparition of ruin, he had revolted from the crushing yoke, and sworn in hysterical screams that they should henceforth earn their own bread.

That was what set Rufus on the war-path as an adventurer.

Well, the guilty pair were now waiting in Paris for the fatal bulletin from Vulpino.

They had taken extraordinary precaution to carry out their part of the plot, although Rufus, with a lurking uneasiness, was always grumbling that he did not exactly see Vulpino's game in sending them off in such a hurry, and keeping Godiva with himself and his assistant, Barber.

Vulpino's sudden care for their safety puzzled the conspirator; he could never be got to believe in such consideration for other people.

And it was not a well-thought-out move, either.

"Rather a mixed-up affair, eh, Gav?" he would mumble, raising his haggard face from between his hands, where he was hanging over a litter of papers spread on the little marble table which stood like an islet in the middle of an ocean of polished floor in the wide, barren *salon* of his Parisian "apartments;" "this shoving of us two off here while he stops to oversee the death, with Godiva mewed up beside him. All very fair to a superficial glance, I dare say, but it don't satisfy me." Rufus, you will see, had by this time so familiarized himself to the thoughts of his kinsman's murder that he could name it without perceptible flinching; and entertained as high an opinion of his own sagacity as ever.

Gavaine, who turned over all matters requiring thought to his brother, as being his peculiar province, lazily lifted his bull-dog head and bloated red face from the hard velvet and gilt roller that did duty as a cushion in one end of the low flat sofa—he was dozing off last night's carouse, and felt not averse to a little fraternal communion of soul.

"What's up, old chap?" yawned he, closing his mighty jaws with an audible snap, and wiping the water from his eyes with his hand. Gavaine never could be a gentleman.

Rufus pushed into a heap the papers on the little table, raps of the great Dornoch estate, parchments covered with specifications of the innumerable sources of the Derwent income of thirty thousand a year—the toothsome enumerations of that Promised Land for which he had sold his soul; and springing to his feet, he moved nervously hither and thither through the broad, echoing room, catching unpleasant glimpses of his own insignificant person and mean face in the mirrors which almost lined the walls, according to French ideas of elegance.

"Let's see, now, what was Vulpino's ostensible plan," said he, thrusting his hands elbow deep into his trousers pockets, and snatching them out again, to clasp them behind him in more dignified pose, when he caught the mirrored reflection of that uncouth figure; "Derwent bitten by mad dog on hunting field—further wounded by accident, by favorite kinsman, Gavaine Marshall—named, with his brother Rufus, co-heir in will. Wound cauterized with due precaution; guests depart; nephew in disgrace intrudes; is ejected by stratagem by co-heirs; excel-

lent excuse in Derwent's estrangement from him; Derwent kept concealed from all eyes save those of co-heirs and the physician they have summoned; excellent excuse again, in symptoms of hydrophobia; and now comes in Vulpino's last game!"

Rufus had a habit of summing up cases in the above highly elliptical style, always to his own entire satisfaction and enlightenment; but Gavaine was apt to feel bewildered and half frightened, as at the inexplicable mutterings of an enchanter, and to turn rusty on the head of it.

He turned more than usually rusty now, and hoisting his mighty bulk on one giant elbow, his red-streaked eyes bulging from their sockets, he bawled in no loving manner:

"What the dogs are ye gibbering about, man? Can't ye speak out if ye've got anything to say? Hang me if I couldn't mash you to a jelly this precious minute, ye sneaking varlet!"

Rufus, the superior spirit of these two deplorably inferior spirits, thus unwarrantably assaulted when he was doing the reasoning process on behalf of his brother as well as himself, although he looked a little white about the mouth from physical fear—which was a morbid weakness he had always much ado to conceal from the brute Gavaine, who would instantly have rushed at him and gratified a life-long grudge against his sulky, sneaking, superior ways, had he suspected this terror—Rufus, I say, though quailing as usual before Gavaine's physical violence, was so exasperated by his idiotic interruption and insolence under such circumstances that he came to a dead halt not far from the bully; his eyes glaring so eerily, his lips so pale and writhing, and his hands, which, like a woman, he never clenched, quivering so strangely, that the great booby on the sofa actually thought Rufus had suddenly grown mad, and floundered off the sofa and behind the gilded easel in the corner with a howl of terror.

"What do you mean, Gavaine, by *daring* to talk so to me?" panted Rufus, in that husky whisper that always made his brother's blood run cold, because it was so unnatural to him, who in his furies yelled at the top of his voice, to hear such suppressed accents coming from a fellow as angry as Rufus. "What do you mean, I say? Dolt, fool, blundering ass, if you can't understand anything but how to eat and sleep and get drunk, can't you have the decency to let me alone when I am bothering my brains to see into your business as well as my own? Take care, you fool; don't rouse me; I warn you, I'm not in the mood to let you off too easy if you go too far—and if once I take you in hand—well—" And with this vague menace, all the more appalling to Gavaine from its mysterious indefiniteness, Rufus, seeing him cowed, choked down the insane rage which had possessed him, rather startled himself to realize how excitable he had grown, and how wildly murderous his impulses had been.

The natures of these men were changing strangely under the course they were pursuing; crime cannot be taken by the hand, welcomed to the hearth, seated at the board, housed and consorted with as an honored guest, without fearfully and swiftly reconstructing the nature of its host. And Rufus had head enough to observe this hopeless deterioration, and heart enough to pine and fret himself over it.

He would be a gentleman: was he only perfecting himself into a ruffian?

As for Gavaine, he began as a brute, the character was only developing.

After an awkward pause the younger brother came out from behind his barricade, and scowling sullenly, threw himself again on the sofa, and muttered:

"Well, what *were* you saying, anyhow?"

Rufus made a desperate effort, and recovered his politeness.

"All right, old man; I needn't have been so peppy," he said, a graceful apology which cowed his bully brother far more than all the violence on earth could have done. "Fact is I'm worn out waiting on this infernal thing, and the thoughts of it don't seem too pleasant. I'm anxious—I'm uneasy; I don't half trust that foreign serpent, Vulpino—can't quite make him out."

"Eh? eh?" shouted Gavaine, sprawling up again to double his fists and square about the room; "think old blackamoor's playing it low on us? Shall I sort of waltz over there and punch the truth out of him?" and, completely subjugated by Rufus's superiority in self-conquest as well as in logical powers, he stood before the slim, sickly-looking schemer, ready to stride off on any mission at his nod.

"No, not exactly, my poor fellow," quoth Rufus, with amicable contempt; "that would not help us much. You may thank the Powers that you have not got to reason this thing out. A pretty mess you'd make of it! No, we can do nothing until he communicates with us. His ostensible reason for sending us here was—(now attend, and try to understand, for as long as you are in your present haze about the scheme you are as dangerous as a concealed torpedo; the merest hint of a question put by keen parties might set you off.) We agreed, Vulpino, Godiva and I (as usual, you were drunk, and heard nothing)—that the death could never be managed safely at the Weald, right under the noses of all the neighboring gentry, who would be the first people to attack our position, hating us as they do for having taken their confounded aristocratical" ("aristocratical" was one of the test words which branded Rufus as a plebeian) "Kilmyre's place in the old man's favor. So we had to remove the invalid to some place where it would be possible and natural for him to die quickly, unseen by any one but ourselves, so that we could safely aver that his remains were disfigured and decomposed through the violence of his sufferings, and the poison of hydrophobia in his system; and for that cause fetch him home to the family vault at Dornoch in a sealed casket."

"Paris was fixed upon, and one of the medical es-

tablishments for hydrophobia judiciously hinted at without being named. To outsiders it sounded well that we two should spare no trouble and neglect no means open to us, to save our kinsman's life; it was also quite plausible for us to remove him secretly, permitting no eye to see the hideous sufferings of the madman.

"But, although the world was to suppose him under the treatment of the most skillful specialists, and attended by his devoted connections, we dared not let him out of our sole custody; we might be tracked by Kilmyre, and our prize taken from us; so we hid him in the ruined tower, shut up the house, and waited, the four of us, in one common prison for his death.

"Then comes Vulpino back from the hidden girl's tomb, with news of her safe removal—fetching along one of his own creatures to watch Derwent toward the last, with the excuse that the sight would be too painful for us; and no sooner is this stranger, whom none of us ever saw or heard of before, set down by our kinsman's bedside, than Vulpino comes to counsel us three, Godiva, you and I—to go off to Paris during the *the finishing*—the excuses for this being that folks all believe us there, and it might leak out that we had never left the house; then again it might leak out that Derwent died under suspicious circumstances at his own house—and we could thus prove our residence in Paris at that precise time—while Vulpino would be far beyond pursuit, and easily could elude justice, even suppose they traced the death to him.

"He was to telegraph when Derwent died, then we were to come from Paris with our sealed coffin, which would receive the remains when it reached the Weald. All this seemed sensible enough, and we agreed to fulfill his directions; and you remember how struck I was when at the last minute he declared that Miss Montacute could not accompany us for a reason he could not then give us. I saw her alone for a moment, and she seemed half beside herself with excitement. Then I thought Vulpino had seen that it would be dangerous for her reason should we take her away with us, where he could not watch her.

"We have obeyed his instructions to the letter. Instead of going to one of the big hotels here we have mewed ourselves up for ten days in this slow hole where no English people ever come. I have arranged matters so that should any trouble rise by and by as to the cause of Derwent's death, or that he died in his own house, and not in Paris—witnesses will come forward to prove that you and I lived here by ourselves during the whole latter part of his illness, and never left Paris till all was over. But why do we hear nothing from Vulpino? Gavaine, I sometimes turn sick with the thought that Vulpino has turned his coat and is letting Derwent redeem his life for a few more thousand than we promised him!"

Gavaine, who had gradually fallen asleep under his brother's lengthy synopsis of the case, started broad awake as he uttered the concluding sentence, perhaps roused by the sudden change of his voice from a thoughtful monotone to the quick, sharp tones of keen apprehension.

"Let me overhaul him!" shouted he, to prove how wide awake he had been throughout. "I'll argy the case with him by law of fist. Lor! I'd soon put a head on him!"

Mr. Gavaine Marshall's diction was always rather highly spiced, both with blasphemies and with the silliest and vulgarest slang of the day. Rendered fit for dainty ears by the weeding out of all his oaths and much of his slang, his utterances look tame and pointless on paper, like some feeble musical theme without its variations.

"Be quiet!" said Rufus, much as you would say "be quiet!" to your dog; "you know you are to do exactly as I bid you and no more or less. On second thoughts, I do not see how Vulpino dare betray us; it would only ruin himself, after his share in the removal of the American girl, eh? He was acting agent there, d'ye see? and whatever happened to us as his employers, the actual murder would have to be answered for by his own neck; and what would he do with Godiva? Then again, what if she broke down and refused to let him go on with Derwent? I scarcely think that likely, recalling how splendidly resolute and calm she was over it when we were quaking in our shoes. But, bah! how intolerable suspense is!"

"Splendidly resolute" means cool as a butcher, I suppose," growled Gavaine, even his brutal nature revolting from the recollection of the beautiful, merciless woman. "I wish ye joy of your wife, Rufe; I'd rather you nor me, you better b'lieve."

"Hush!" snarled Rufus, for the hard knuckles of the *conciierge* (the door-keeper) were rapping smartly upon their door.

A telegram had come at last, which, ripped open with feverish excitement by the long, trembling fingers of Rufus as soon as the old man had withdrawn, was found to contain this announcement:

"V. to Ms.:

"Achieved. Return at convenience."

"Done!" cried Gavaine, with a hoarse, half-hearted attempt at the note of victory.

Rufus turned away, laughing idiotically. Soon he turned round to his brother, still laughing loudly, but with a fixed, painful distortion of the facial muscles, and a distracted air.

"Get—me—something—I'm going—to—to faint—" gasped he, and suddenly stopped his hysterical laughter, and fell heavily on the floor.

Gavaine stared stupidly at him; after some moments he bethought him to stoop and examine his brother, and discovered that he was not dead. Mechanically he rummaged his pockets for his flask, and not finding it, would have given up in despair, had not the glittering wine-service on the sideboard caught his eye; he poured out a large goblet full of

Keen old whisky, swallowed about half of it himself neat, without winking, and returned with the rest to Rufus.

This young man soon rallied, gathered himself and the fateful telegram up from the floor, and tottered into his dressing-room, which he instantly locked.

Gavaine gaped stupidly at the closed door, flung a nervous glance around, grew yellow pale, and then rushed to that door, and hammered on it with fists and feet, yelling out like a savage:

"Rufe! Rufe! let me in! let me in, I say! I'll go crazy out here by myself!"

A voice hissed through the crack of the door:

"If you don't stop your noise and leave me alone, I'll shoot you dead."

And, after that there was awful silence, while the brothers faced their bloody deed, each by himself apart, and the air seemed full of sighs, and groans, and rustling wings of evil imps rejoicing.

Neither went to bed that night.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE WAGES OF SIN.

THREE days afterward the brothers Marshall arrived at Dornoch, bearing, in mournful cortege, the presumed body of their deceased kinsman.

A telegram had come to the Reverend Mr. Grindon from Rufus, announcing the melancholy end of the Master of Dornoch-Weald, who had died of hydrophobia, in spite of the utmost skill of the best medical specialists in Paris; and naming the day when the remains would arrive at the railway station, Linnhe, to be conveyed in solemn state to the Derwent vault, on his own estate.

The whole country-side turned out to do honor to the great man. The procession was longer than any that had trodden these rugged mountain passes since her majesty had passed by ten years before, on her way to Wales; the cathedral was packed with the flower of the country gentry, as well as by hundreds of the tenantry, whose uncouth comments let many a proud heart into strange and moving secrets of the late squire's benevolence and charity. The clergyman did his best in eulogy of a life that had always kept jealously aloof from ecclesiastical interference; and a death too terrible to dwell upon; and the old man's heart waxed sore and bitter as he noted the conspicuous absence of Geoffrey Kilmyre, the only mortal whom Derwent had truly loved; and then a quick pang of remorse convulsed him when he recalled his part in the estrangement between uncle and nephew.

After all, was it well to drive from his side the boy whom he loved—the boy who loved him, as Geoffrey certainly had always done, in spite of the wild follies which had revolted and embittered the soul of the clergyman against him?

Ah! how easy it is to sow dissension and mistrust between proud hearts; and how hard, how hard to give them back to each other, with the old full, unquestioning faith?

Alas! Is it worth while to point out the follies and frailties of our poor passion-marred hearts—since all are more or less short of perfection?

No, let us rather shut our eyes to the faults of our friend; have not we, too, our miserable failings?

Only one ever lived on this fair earth, from darling babyhood to manly prime—and sinned never. Only One!

The lid of the coffin was not removed. There was heart-harrowing reason for this—the malady of which the master of Dornoch-Weald had died had disfigured his countenance too dreadfully to permit mortal eye to look upon it. The lid was screwed down, and although the people present filed round the sumptuous casket as usual, they saw nothing but black draperies and massive silver garnishings.

Nobody went home to the Weald with the heirs-at-law, despite the servile entreaties of Rufus, addressed notably to the big people present, to the utter exclusion of the nobodies—a trifling indication of vulgarity which awoke all the scorn and derision of high and low.

Mr. Rufus Marshall was in no mood to face new disagreements.

He was sick with anxiety and suspicion.

Where was Vulpino? Or Godiva? Or Barber, at least, with a message?

Mr. Derwent's solicitor, Mr. Alleyne, a grave functionary who had never attracted vulgar attention in all his genteel life, found himself the reluctant point of interest, as he stepped up to the young men as they were quitting the place of sepulture, and announced his intention to read the late Mr. Derwent's will in the presence of his kinsmen, Messrs. Rufus and Gavaine Marshall.

Everybody wanted to see what manner of man it was who was going to read the infamous will which was to disinherit one of the noblest scions of the old house, in favor of the base and vulgar sons of what rumor described as a miserable, uneducated old miser of a tailor.

Shocked and disgusted as the old lawyer was by the brusque crudity of Mr. Rufus's manners, and the swinish lethargy of Mr. Gavaine's, he was glad to hide his head in the depths of the traveling-coach into which the co-heirs thrust him and hurried themselves; and he shut his respectable old eyes as they rolled rapidly toward the Weald, so as to escape the galling sight of the plebeian souls and bodies of the new lords of Dornoch.

Arrived at the Weald, Mr. Alleyne was shown into the library, and bidden to wait a moment.

Gavaine was dispatched by his brother to fetch from the cellar such wines as he might deem suitable, in which to drink the approaching victory of the Marshalls; while Rufus flew to find his *inamorata*, Miss Montacute, and his ally, Vulpino.

Through the winding corridors tramped Rufus, searching—searching. He shouted, he stopped to tremble; he hurried on to meet the echoes, but there was nothing more palpable than they.

He came to the door of Godiva's late quarters in the ruined tower; the door which had been burst open, you remember. The idea of abduction came next, and sickened the lover; but then, he saw a sealed letter lying on the dressing-table, ran for it, saw that it was addressed to himself; and reading it, discovered the true complexion of his love.

This is the letter, written by Miss Montacute during the process of getting off with the old love before you are on with the new:

"MR. RUFUS MARSHALL:—I have fallen forever from my seat among good women. Henceforth I must, perforce, consort with bad people. But there are degrees in that sinister society, as in the other. One may have their choice even in that ill-omened company.

"I am a Derwent; that is to say, *supremacy* is life to me. I cannot accept a secondary station:—especially if a first is offered me. You wish me to be your wife; I acknowledge the compliment at the same time that I am obliged to decline it. You are as wicked as your know how to be; but your nature is weak, and your intellect small; you could never be anything but *curiously* wicked. There is not enough manhood about you to subjugate a proud woman.

"I have discovered in your hideous ally, Vulpino, a capability of evil that transcends anything the world has seen since the day of Cagliostro, Prince of Charlatans and Adventurers. His person, hideous to fascination, is a true index of his nature, which is equally hideous. Since I must be a wicked woman, let me earn distinction in my chosen line; with you, I should have been only a despicable wicked woman: with him, I shall wring unwilling applause from every gallant, adventurous spirit, for my unparalleled iniquities. Adieu forever, Rufus Marshall, son of Jack Marshall, the tailor; your presumption in lifting your eyes to a Derwent is hereby justly punished. Feeble of intellect, plebeian in mind and body, how dared you expect to win me? My Caliban is of noble blood; possesses a princely fortune, and appalls me with the depth of his wickedness. With you, I should have stifled; the atmosphere of trade in my drawingroom would have stifled me. Faugh! Get you to your victory:—I pass over my share in the spoil to you.

"Signed. GODIVA MONTACUTE."

Vulpino had added a few lines at the bottom of the sheet.

"MESSRS. MARSHALL:—I tender my profound thanks for your goodness in introducing me to the bravest and most beautiful lady of the nineteenth century. Be tranquil concerning the ten thousand pounds owing me for professional services on your behalf;—I have paid myself quite satisfactorily in the possession of the charming Signorina Montacute.

"Adieu, excellent friends; be happy, as I am.

"Ever yours, faithfully,

"VULPINO."

Rufus Marshall reeled under this most unexpected blow; for a time his distress was enough to have won him pity from his bitterest foe. Among all his forebodings this had never cast the faintest shadow; he had never thought of Vulpino as a man, a man actuated by masculine emotions and impulses; if he had ever cherished jealousy, it was Geoffrey who was in his thoughts. Never, oh, never indeed, could he have guessed that Vulpino, the hideous Italian poisoner, was dangerous in that way.

For a time his anguish overcame all bounds, and he shut himself into his faithless lady's room, and wept and moaned like a stricken girl. And, vile as he was, his love was genuine enough to give him the cruellest pangs of apprehension on her behalf; it frenzied him to imagine the delicate, exquisite Godiva at the mercy of that horrible man; in this one matter Rufus was a man, and he would have laid down his life to secure Godiva from misfortune, even without the hope of any other reward than the consciousness of her happiness.

His heart-broken reverie was interrupted anon by the arrival of Gavaine, clamoring for him to come and hear the will.

Without a word Rufus went; ten minutes afterward the brothers stood on the upper step of the grand portal, bidding adieu to Mr. Alleyne, who had read them into the possession of one of the finest estates and incomes in the kingdom.

As they watched his modest gig rolling down the oak avenue, they turned with one accord and looked at each other.

The will had ordained that these two brothers were to inherit Dornoch-Weald on condition of living there together for one year, after which they might, if they chose, live in separate homes, drawing the income, which of itself was stupendous enough to enable them to live in splendor wherever they wished.

Since the news had come of Mr. Derwent's death, these men had never dared to be alone, no, not for a moment. Either they must have some stranger present, or they must be together. A weird feeling of fright and loneliness was wont to overwhelm them the instant they were alone; they must cower away from the specters that pursued them, together! And considering the small sympathy that was between them, the utter antagonism of all their tastes, could Fate have sent a bitterer retribution upon them?

"Godiva has eloped with Vulpino," said Rufus, with a passing yearning for sympathy.

Gavaine cursed her, and then congratulated himself and Rufus on her departure.

"A sly Jezebel," he vowed. "Never mind, old chap; there are lots of jolly gals that don't know what you've been about, and never will know; I'd rather have one of them."

Rufus scornfully rejected this really sensible suggestion. Misery with Godiva would have seemed to the love-sick swain delirious happiness, compared with the tame contentment to be enjoyed with any

other woman; the unfortunate man loved truly and nobly; and his heart was breaking at his cold, his insulting rejection.

Her name on the coarse lips of Gavaine hurt him like a wound; she had trodden his love and his self-respect in the dust, but who was Gavaine, to dare animadvert upon her conduct? He fiercely rebuked his brother, and so frightened away the blunt but honest sympathy he would otherwise have enjoyed.

"All right, old man," said Gavaine, lazily; "it ain't my funeral, and if you're pleased, I am. But Lord! I don't care to stop here; the place is haunted."

"Bah! don't be a fool!" snarled Rufus; "you'll stop here just as long as I want you. If you suppose I'm the softy to let you make ducks and drakes of our well-fought victory, you're mistaken. Here you and I live, according to the will, for the specified year, if all the ghosts in Purgatory haunted the place."

And Rufus longed to escape to some solitary nook, where he could brood over his miserable victory; yet dared not be alone for a moment, so cowed had his spirit become, under the terrible contemplation of his late crimes. For it was not the least feature of the retribution which had already begun, that these brothers dreaded solitude as a man might dread torture by fire or cord, and preferred each other's uncongenial society to it. They felt themselves to be branded with the mark of Cain; this horrible comradeship in murder knit them together; and, in fact, so awful were the visions they saw whenever they slept, that it was only each other's proximity that reassured them.

And all the while they distrusted and despised each other.

All was settled at last; the will had been presented for probate and duly passed; Geoffrey Kilmyre had not come forward to dispute anything; all was apparently secure.

At this juncture, one would have expected the lucky heirs to be at the height of felicity, and absorbed in merrymaking.

It was not so; had they lost the game, they could not have sat in more hopeless dust and ashes. Rufus mourned his lost love with a devotion worthy of a far better object; and Gavaine's addled brains were reeling with superstitious fancies, caused partly by conscience, partly by the oppressive loneliness of the mansion.

Rufus had done his best to get back the family servants, and to lure the family friends to their places at Otto Derwent's fireside; but without the slightest success in either direction.

The family servants refused to re-enter the Weald as long as it was held by "the likes of them tailor folks;" and the "gentry" opened their eyes in amazement at the presumption of "that sort of people" in expecting them to associate with them; also, ugly stories were afloat, and all Dornoch buzzed with the whispers of the curious.

Meanwhile the refugees were daily gathering strength and health in the shelter they had chosen; carefully guarding against discovery for a time, during which they watched with interest the doings of the guilty pair.

The denouement came one day, unexpectedly. In vain had the brothers searched for the grave of Mr. Derwent. Vulpino had left no clew to it.

This of itself was a source of keen anxiety; Rufus wearied mind and body searching for it; and Gavaine imagined all sorts of absurd things, and nearly died of fear at his own fancies.

As Rufus strolled over the domain, accompanied by one of the new servants he had at length got from London, he trembled lest they might stumble over a rudely-made mound of earth any minute; and Gavaine was apt to see strange glistening things rising whitely out of the ground, and to utter crazed speeches which brought the cold, inquisitive eyes of the hirelings upon him with perilous interest, while they set the heart of Rufus beating wildly.

Presently the new domestics were received into the bosom of Dornoch's society, and in return for their sketches of the life lived by the brothers at the Weald, were instructed in the whole history of the disinheritor of Geoffrey Kilmyre, and the good luck of the "common trash" now in power, for by these terms were the fortunate heirs frequently designated by Derwent's people.

"I see, I see!" as Gavaine's valet was heard to assert; "it wa'n't for nothing my boss is frightened for to sleep alone—for a great baby! An' makes me sleep on the sofa in his room. An' as for sleepin' in the dark, Lor'! he'd raise the house, you bet!"

"Ay? Humph! my boss ain't quite such a soft," said Mr. Rufus's valet, in his turn; "but of all the pining, sickly devils, he's the biggest one I ever come across. 'Stead of takin' pride in his good luck, an' acting triumphant, he just sets and frets. An' it ain't all along of the young lady what jilted him, neither; mark my words, good folks, Mr. Rufus Marshall he has got something onto his mind which is bound to come out, sooner or later."

Thus the authorities down-stairs; soon every eye was riveted upon Dornoch-Weald and its new possessors. According to the provisions of the will they had tacked the name of Derwent onto their own, and now flourished in all documents written by themselves as Rufus Marshall Derwent, and Gavaine Marshall Derwent.

They stayed drearily alone at the great house, hoping to live down the effects of the curse they had brought upon themselves; but never did time pass so maddeningly slow; at that rate the year of probation would never pass!

Rufus still held the mastery over Gavaine's brute nature; more than ever before, indeed, for Gavaine was giving himself up more and more to habits of intoxication; there were few moments of his day and night that were not at least scented with the odor of intoxicating liquors. His mind, never a

sound one, was rapidly giving way; sometimes Rufus would come out of his wretched reverie, struck with the grisly suspicion that Gavaine was turning imbecile.

If this were so, what might he not babble? Ay, but if this were really so he would have to be removed to an insane asylum, whose functionaries would have to be blinded by gold, deafened by gold, rid of all logical inference by gold; gold paid by Rufus.

Rufus set himself to watch; set himself to guard against the perils of Gavaine's awakened conscience. Once he caught himself speculating on Gavaine's chances of living long; wondering whether it would not be best for him to die instead of living to be a gibbering maniac, ready to make such revelations as would ruin his brother. But when he had detected the turn of his musings, Rufus uttered a cry, terrible as the dismayed yell of the condemned soul, and he tore his hair and beat his breast in self-abhorrence.

It had come to this, that he could speculate on his brother's death!

One evening Gavaine, rendered courageous for the moment by deep libations with his dinner, strolled out by himself into the moonlight. He was drunk; yet so thoroughly well seasoned that he walked as straight as any Pharisee, only foolishly beneficent of mood. Some hours afterward he bounded into his brother's presence, as he sat crouching over his everlasting papers in the library; he seemed to be convulsed with terror, his eyes bulged from their sockets, his features worked, foam oozed from his gaping, panting mouth, and his hands twitched, and grasped the air.

He fell in a heap on the carpet at his brother's feet, clutching his legs and clinging to them, like any frightened child.

"In heaven's name, man, what has happened?" muttered Rufus, in a dying voice; he was always prepared for frightful misfortunes. It was now the habit of his mind to look for disaster.

"I've seen them—seen them—oh, God!" shivered Gavaine; "hand in hand—loving each other—but the look—oh, the look they gave me!" he moaned and writhed, almost seized by a fit.

"Seen who?" demanded Rufus, sternly; he thought Gavaine merely tipsy; "don't be a fool, Gavaine; go and get some soda. You're drunk."

"You won't believe me?" cried Gavaine, looking up in his brother's eyes with his own blood-streaked orbs, "why, man, I tell you on my oath that I saw Mr. Derwent and the young lady from America walking in the forest just outside of Toby Cargill's patch; they held each other's hands, and they were smiling at each other. And Geoffrey Kilmyre was walking by himself, behind them a little way. I tell you I saw them! I wasn't thinking on them. For a wonder I had forgotten the whole cursed crew. As they came toward me through the trees I thought they were some strangers who didn't know they were trespassing; and I stopped to tell them so; but by-and-by I knew them, and I very nearly died. They came on closer—and closer, not speaking a word, but only coming closer and closer—all three gazing at me, oh, such awful eyes! So at last I broke away from the horrid spell, and ran the whole way home. Sneer as you please, you will see them yourself some day; don't think to get off any better than me; if they haunt me they will haunt you; and far worse, I should say, if our deserts are taken into account. You were always twice as full of this here plot as I was; oh, Lor'! if you had only let it alone! If I see them again I swear I'll go to Justice Fairbairn and confess the whole."

"You needn't take the trouble," snarled Rufus, whose contemptuous attention to Gavaine's weak maunderings had given place to sudden bitter hate and dread; "if you want to kill yourself by hanging I had rather accommodate you myself. Hanging ain't the fashion in the Derwent family. If you die, you die privately, like a gentleman."

"Hist!" sharply aspirated Gavaine, sitting up on his knees with a scared face, "who's that at the window?"

The brothers turned their heads with one accord toward the open French casement; and perceived three people entering.

These were Mr. Derwent, Monica and Geoffrey.

A frightful sense of choking, of blindness—of helpless, hopeless dismay, and Rufus slid to a kneeling posture, and buried his craven face in his hands.

Gavaine gave one yell, leaped into a corner, and cowered there, a raving maniac!

"We were coming to you," said the Master of Dornoch-Weald. "It is time the farce should end. We have given you time to enjoy your triumph, won as you supposed through crime and bloodshed—have you enjoyed it? No! look at that mental wreck! Look at your own emaciated frame, and recall the never-lulled gnawing of remorse which has eaten into every one of the spoils, which you periled so much to obtain. This shall be your punishment; I desire no more poignant one to overtake you. Was it worth all the risks you have run, the anguish of mind you have incurred, the scorn of each other, and the self-contempt; was your supposed victory worth all these? No, you wicked men; your will to do evil was great, but, being enlightened beings, you could not quite smother conscience. Fools! To dream of enjoying a victory won through such enormities! Go, wretches; I have no wish to retain you for punishment. God has taken your punishment in His own hands. Away! Let me never behold your Judas faces again."

Rufus Marshall staggered to his feet; and with head on his breast, eyes half-closed, and his whole frame shuddering with grief and trouble, drew the passive arm of the idiot Gavaine into his, and in dead silence these two went forth from the stately Weald, defeated.

But the Master of Dornoch-Weald, and his idolized daughter, and the ever-loved Geoffrey; these three were happy together.

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